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OR,

THE SKELETON TRAIL.

A Story of a Detective Nemesis.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "KENT KINGDON THE CARD KING,"
"THE CREOLE CORSAIR," "THE BUCK
SKIN ROVERS," "BUCK TAYLOR,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

CAMILLE CAMERON.

"Have I done wrong in keeping this secret
from dear, noble Horace?"

"I told him that I had never loved before,
and it is true, for I was fascinated with Kent
Kingdon. but never loved him, as now I know

"ANOTHER ANGEL IN SPORTS' PARADISE, PARDS, SO GIVE HER A WELCOME."

the meaning of the word since I have met Horace.

"In telling him that he was my only idol, I fear I implied a falsehood, for I had been engaged to Kent Kingdon, and, but that he broke with me I might have one day been his wife.

"Heaven forbid! for he is a dangerous man, one faithless alike to man and woman.

"My pride would not let me tell Horace that we had been engaged and that Kingdon broke it, for I fear he would have given me up, knowing what a bad character Kent Kingdon has, or he might have resented it.

"Ah, me! somehow I feel awful blue about this little deceit I have practiced, and I will tell Horace all when next he comes."

The speaker was a handsome girl, one of a strange, Italian beauty, with eyes that could melt in tenderness, or flash with anger.

Her face was a strange one, each feature being pronounced, and it was handsome rather than beautiful.

The form was above the medium height, slender, shapely and every movement graceful. She was well dressed, and about her were refined surroundings.

The father of this maiden had been an artist, who had married a beautiful Italian girl, who was sitting as his model while he was prosecuting his studies in Rome.

He had brought his Italian wife back to America with him and settled in the old New England town that had been his birthplace.

The cold winters of New England, after his long stay in Italy, had broken down his health, and the second year after his return he died, his wife following him to the grave a year after, and leaving two children, a son and daughter, to the guardianship of a brother of her husband.

The son, Carter Cameron entered West Point as a cadet, when he grew old enough, and the daughter Camille, finished her education at a fashionable boarding-school and came back to the home of her guardian, to turn the heads of the students of the college in the town, with her handsome face and exquisite form.

Among her admirers was one from Texas, the son of a rich cattle-king there, and a dashing fellow, handsome as an Adonis, brilliant, and dangerous.

He had fairly fascinated Camille Cameron at sight, and he had been at once drawn toward her.

But Kent Kingdon wishing his own way, could not tolerate her jealousy, and they broke, no one ever having known that they had been engaged.

There came as a student to the college Horace Manners, a young man of noble nature, fine-looking and considered a good catch.

It seemed to be a case of love at first sight, between the two, Horace Manners and Camille Cameron, and it was because she had deceived him about her secret engagement to Kent Kingdon, that she was bewailing having done so in the words that open this chapter.

"I will tell him all to-morrow," she said, and then she thought the cloud would lift from her heart.

But it did not, for its shadow still lay there.

That night Horace Manners did not come to see her, and the next morning she had just finished breakfast, when the servant told her a gentleman wished to see her.

She swept into the parlor, looking very lovely in her wrapper, and was confronted by a student from the college whom she knew but slightly.

He bowed low, and the expression upon his face caused her to feel that some evil had happened.

"Miss Cameron, it pains me to be the bearer of bad news."

"Speak, Mr. Walpole, and tell me what has happened."

Her words were perfectly calm, though her face became suddenly pale.

"I am sorry to tell you that Mr. Horace Manners has been seriously wounded in a duel."

"Horace Manners wounded in a duel?" she repeated.

"Yes, Miss Cameron."

"When was this duel fought?"

"Last night, in the grove on the river."

"Who was Mr. Manners's adversary?"

"Kent Kingdon."

"Ah!"

In spite of herself the word was wrung from her like a cry of pain.

"Who were the seconds?"

"I served Mr. Manners, and Hugh Lawton acted for Kingdon."

"And he was dangerously wounded, you say?"

"Yes, I fear fatally, for the sword pierced his side in the vicinity of the heart."

She bowed her head impatiently, as though to hide her feelings, and then said:

"And the cause of this duel, Mr. Walpole?"

"Mr. Kingdon had a private album, which poor Manners got hold of, and in it he saw your photograph, and beneath it a number, Thirteen, and some slighting lines, written by Kent Kingdon."

"Go on, sir," and the voice was unmoved.

"Manners resented it, and said that you had never given the photograph to Kingdon, words followed, the lie was passed, and, heated with wine, for we were all taking supper with Kingdon at his rooms, we adjourned to the woods, and, in the moonlight the duel was fought."

"We hoped Kingdon would disarm Manners, and thus end it; but he was determined to kill him, and I fear succeeded."

"I thank you, Mr. Walpole, and permit me to say, that, as the betrothed wife of Horace Manners, I will at once seek him."

"May I ask about Kent Kingdon?"

"He has gone."

"Was he allowed to go, after his guilty act?"

"It was thought best that he should take to flight, Miss Cameron."

"Flight will not save him from the hangman's grip, if Horace Manners dies," and in uttering the words the calm of the woman was broken, and her fierce words Henry Walpole had cause to remember long after.

CHAPTER II.

CAMILLE'S OATH.

KENT KINGDON, the man who had slain Horace Manners in his duel, escaped the consequences of his deed, while the victim was laid away to rest in the little churchyard.

There were those who beheld Camille Cameron at the bedside of Horace Manners, ere he died, and who saw her at the grave, when his coffin was forever shut out from her sight, that said she had no heart, and had simply meant to marry the young man for his money.

But one day the father of Horace Manners appeared in the town, and, after hearing the whole story from Henry Walpole, he sought the home of the maiden who had been engaged to his son.

"Miss Cameron," he said, earnestly, "I had but two children, Horace and my daughter Mabel, now a young girl."

"This blow has fallen most heavily upon me, for, through indorsing for friends, my fortune has been swept away."

"I have a profession, for I am a physician, and, with the little money I have left, we are going to the far West."

"There I shall homestead a place and go to practicing medicine, trying to build up my fallen fortunes, and there, my dear Miss Cameron, you will ever find a welcome if you wish to make your home with us."

For the first time since Henry Walpole had told her of the duel, the lips of Camille Cameron quivered.

She did not speak at first, for she could not command her emotion; but, after a while, she said:

"Doctor Manners, from my heart I thank you, and I deeply feel for you in your deep sorrow and unfortunate troubles; but I will remain here for the present, until I can decide upon my future."

"Your son was all in all to me, and he was the only man I ever loved."

"Fascinated, as it were, by Kent Kingdon, I received his attentions, and, urged by my guardians, I became engaged to him."

"The photograph he had of mine I did not give him, but he took it to paint for me, as he is an artist, and never returned it."

"Knowing of one of his escapades I upbraided him, and, calling me a jealous fool he left me, and our engagement ended."

"I am not rich, but I have a small income, and so I will not want; but I shall leave here, for my guardians are constantly hunting good catches for me in a matrimonial way."

Thus they parted, and while Doctor Manners returned West, and, with his wife and daughter sought a home upon the far frontier, Camille Cameron remained at her old home.

In vain did her guardian and his wife try to rouse her from her indifference to all about her.

She refused to receive company, kept to herself and seemed to be constantly in deepest meditation.

One day a lawyer called at her home and asked for an interview with her.

The result was a surprise to her, and he came from the city.

Some property owned by her father, and supposed to be of little value, had suddenly developed into a large fortune.

There was a large cash price offered for it, and having seen Cadet Carter Cameron at West Point, and gotten his views upon the subject, the lawyer decided to sell it.

This he did, upon his return to the city, and Camille's share, put into bonds, was held subject to her demand.

It was a large sum for a young girl to control, and her guardian and others sought the management and investment of it, but she was firm in her refusal, and evidently was bound to have things her own way; so she placed the money in a bank in the city.

Then a change seemed to come over the beautiful girl, for she was no longer moody, but went about like one who had a purpose in life, though she was always the same cold, seemingly heartless creature.

One afternoon she went, as was her wont, to the cemetery.

She had placed over the grave of Horace Manners a handsome marble monument, with this inscription upon it:

"SACRED TO THE MEMORY

OF

HORACE MANNERS.

Killed in a duel, May 1st, 18—, by the hand of
KENT KINGDON.

Some day the guilty man will meet his just
reward."

Kneeling by the side of this, the tomb of her lover, Camille raised her hands above her, and with white, cold face, firm, stern voice, uttered the words:

"Horace Manners, here at thy grave, before high Heaven, I vow to be an avenging Nemesis upon the track of thy murderer, and as I keep this oath, may God be merciful unto me."

Then rising from her knees, just as the sun had set and the moon was rising over the hill-tops, she retraced her way homeward.

The next morning Camille Cameron was missing.

She had mysteriously disappeared from her home, in the dead of night, and all manner of surmises were made as regarded her fate.

At last the belief became general that she had not been the heartless woman many had supposed, but had, in her hidden grief, gone to the river and taken her own life, thus to end her sorrows in the oblivion of death.

As a strong chain of evidence to this theory, she had taken nothing with her from her home, excepting a heavy wrap, which had been found upon the river-bank; but, worst of all to her guardians, not a clew, not a slip of paper had she left as to where she had deposited her bonds, and the grief at their loss was fully equal to the sorrow they felt at the beautiful girl's untimely end.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE OVERLAND.

"I AM in hard luck, indeed, but I must not go under, for there is plenty of gold in the world for those who work for it."

One would have thought that the one who uttered these words meant to live an honest life of toil, to work out of misfortune which seemed to have fallen upon him.

He was seated in front of a stage station on the Overland, a desolate place in the mountains, waiting for the coming of the coach.

He had arrived there an hour before, bartered with the station agent for a fair price for his horse, saddle and bridle, and the money he had thus received was all that he had in the world.

The man was Kent Kingdon, the slayer of Horace Manners in a duel.

He was a fugitive from justice, hiding away upon the border, and dreading to be taken back East for trial.

Though the son of a man who had been a rich cattle-king in Texas, his father had lost his fortune at the time that Kent Kingdon became a fugitive.

His second, Hugh Lawton, had sold out the elegant furniture and many things of value in his rooms at college, and had sent him the money to a mining-camp West, addressed to Donald King, for he had feared to keep his own name.

In gambling and dissipation the money had been squandered, and at last Kent Kingdon had realized that he was throwing his life away.

"I am capable of better things; the world owes me a living, and I shall draw on demand for it," he said to himself, when he awoke one morning to find that his horse, saddle and bridle and weapons were all that he had in the world.

The mining-camp was dull and he determined to seek new scenes, and new associations.

Arriving at the stage station, he had disposed of his horse, for a good sum, and with a couple of hundred dollars was going to take the first coach further east.

He cared not where it took him.

He was adrift and so would go with the tide; but he vowed to give up dissipation and become a different man.

"If Fate serves me well, I will do no wrong."

"If Fate goes against me, gold I must have at any risk."

Such he made his creed, and while calmly awaiting the coming of the stage-coach, he was planning for the future.

Work he would not, but he would make gold by other means, fair or foul.

As he sat there, he appeared a man to admire and respect.

His form was tall, broad-shouldered, graceful, yet athletic, and he was dressed in a handsome hunting costume, with top-boots and slouch hat.

He wore his belt of arms like a man who knew their use, and his face showed the courage to use them.

His manners were almost lazy, his face peculiarly handsome, for it was that of a man who might do only the noblest deeds under some circumstances, and become as wicked as Satan under others.

His eyes were fascinating in their gentle expression, full of a brooding sadness, and yet they could light up with a fiend-like fury when aroused.

Since his flight from the college, he had drifted aimlessly about, living on the best, drinking hard and taking life as it came to him, until he had suddenly awakened to a realization of the fact that he was throwing his life away.

Presently in the distance were heard the notes of a bugle, and it told that the stage-coach was coming.

Not long after the coach dashed into view, coming along at a swiftness of pace, and with the six horses unurged by the driver, for they knew rest was at hand.

The coach stopped before the station, and Doc Dunning the driver, threw the reins upon the backs of his horses, while he dismounted with the air of a man who felt his importance, and no unimportant thing was it to be a stage-driver in those days on the Overland.

"Well, Doc, you is on time."

"Any pilgrims?" asked Bentley, the station boss, as Doc Dunning approached him.

"Waal I has one, and it's as pretty a gal as runs in these parts."

"She's a-going West to find her father, she says."

"I'll tell her to go in and get supper, for I s'pose it's ready."

"Yas, jist off the fire," and Bentley and Doc Dunning approached the coach and threw open the door.

"Come, Miss Pretty Face, for you is deservin' of ther name, you gits grub here, and then we'll sail along ag'in."

"This are Bill Bentley, the station boss, miss, and he'll see that yer fills up, for he's got a good table, ef he don't put on style."

"I thank you, sir," and with this a young girl sprung out of the coach.

Her form was perfection, her face beautiful, innocent looking and yet full of marked character.

She tripped lightly into the log stage-station, and as she passed Kent Kingdon, who stood near the door, their eyes met and he raised his hat.

She knew the custom of the country, and bowed in return, while she seemed surprised at meeting there a person such as he appeared.

"Who's yer pard, Ben?" asked Doc Dunning with a nod toward Kingdon.

"Some pilgrim as come down from the mining-camps, sold me his horse and outfit, and goes along in your hearse somewhar, ther Lord only knows."

"Chipper, hain't he?"

"He looks like a good one, he does."

"Guess he fingers the pasteboards from his looks."

"Maybe" and the two went in to supper, Kingdon also going.

Half an hour after, with a fresh team the

coach rolled away, Kingdon taking a seat inside, instead of on the box as Doc Dunning invited him to do.

"I am tired and need rest," he said.

"He's struck with the gal, I guesses; but I'll stand no nonsense," Doc Dunning had whispered to Ben Bentley.

The sun was yet a couple of hours bright and the run to the next station was a long one, and over a terrible road, dangerous in the extreme even by day.

Then too there were road-agents along that part of the Overland who frequently "held up" the stage when there was a considerable amount of gold or booty to be obtained by so doing.

Kingdon had thrown himself upon the front seat, as though not to annoy his companion, and the two rode on in silence together.

But often did the man find the eyes of the girl cast upon him with furtive glances.

Still he made no effort to enter into conversation, and she was the first to speak, for suddenly she burst forth with an expression of admiration, as her eyes fell upon a grand view that suddenly was visible from the stage window.

"How grandly beautiful!" she cried, more to herself than her companion.

Kent Kingdon glanced out of the window, and as he did so, there came in a stern voice:

"Halt your old hearse, Doc Dunning, for there's gold aboard I want!"

There came a shot from the box, a yell at the horses, and the animals sprung forward at a run.

Leaning out of the window Kingdon saw two men endeavoring to stop the horses, there were shots fired, and he too opened fire with his revolvers.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEMESIS ON THE TRAIL.

THERE was no doubt but that the two men whom Kent Kingdon fired upon went down for he saw them fall, and he knew that his aim was true.

Doc Dunning had fired the first shot, and had wounded the man who had called to him to stand and deliver, for an exclamation of mingled rage and pain had broken from his lips.

In return he had been shot by one of the half dozen road-agents visible.

Glancing up at the box, as the horses went flying madly along, Kent Kingdon saw that Doc Dunning was either dead or badly wounded and that the team was under no control.

A look toward his fair fellow passenger showed him that she had swooned away.

He knew well their danger, with that runaway team along that mountain trail, and he quickly drew himself out of the coach window up to the box, and no easy matter was it, with the vehicle swaying wildly as the horses sped along at full speed.

Doc Dunning lay in a heap, conscious, but badly wounded.

"I'm done for, pard, and we'll all go together unless you kin pull 'em up afore we reach ther Devil's Leap," he groaned.

"I think I can manage them," was the calm reply, and he took the reins from the hand of the brave driver, who still clutched them in his weakening grasp.

"Stop 'em, pard, ef you knows how, afore we reaches ther Devil's Leap, or we all goes ter glory tergether," moaned Doc Dunning.

As he saw that Kingdon gathered up the reins coolly, and with the air of one who knew how to drive, he seemed relieved, and muttered:

"Yer saves your life, and the pretty gal's too; but I'm done for."

"That's a bad road ahead o' you, pard, to Silver Run Station, and you must go slow."

"Thars a bag o' gold in ther boot here and it b'longs to ther company, so jist give it to ther next driver, Sam Leslie, when you gits to ther station, and tell him it goes through to Flush City, and—"

The man uttered a groan and ceased speaking.

When Kingdon again glanced down at him he was dead.

Kent Kingdon uttered no word, but drove on, rounding Devil's Leap without accident, having gotten the horses under perfect control.

Then he drew rein, for he felt that the road-agents had been too much worsted to follow.

He dismounted from the box and opened the stage door.

The young girl lay in a heap upon the floor, and she was still in a swoon.

Kingdon stood for a moment in silent meditation, his face flushing and paling by turns.

Then he uttered the words:

"By Heaven, but I will!"

Springing up to the box he reached in to the boot and soon drew forth a long bag, the end sealed with sealing-wax.

It was heavy, and was the gold-bag.

Descending to the ground again he ran with it into the woods and was absent for a few minutes there.

Then he returned, and taking a tin-cup which hung to the side of the coach he filled it with water from a rivulet that tumbled over the mountain and approaching the coach bathed the face of the unconscious girl.

It was some time before she came to, and he began to fear that she was dead.

But at last she rallied, gazed into his face, and cried earnestly:

"Ah, sir, what has happened?"

"Are you hurt, miss?" he asked, in a kindly tone.

"No, sir, I am not hurt; but I am so frightened, for I thought they killed the driver and the horses were running away over this fearful road."

"They did kill the poor driver, miss, and robbed the coach of a bag of gold."

"Then I opened fire on them, the horses ran away and I had to get out upon the box to stop them, so you are in no danger now."

"You are so brave, sir, so kind, and I owe my life to you," she said, earnestly.

"I but did my duty, miss."

"But we must be on our way, so make yourself comfortable, while I mount the box and drive on."

"Can I not get on the box with you, sir, for night is coming on and I fear to be alone?"

"If you wish; but let me just remove the body of poor Dunning."

She shuddered, and he got upon the box and secured the body of the dead driver, placing it inside the stage.

This done, he helped the young girl up to a seat on the box, and seizing the reins drove on at a rapid pace.

She watched his skillful handling of the reins, and said:

"You are a wonderful driver, sir."

"I have driven since I was a child."

"Do you live West, sir?"

"My home has been in Texas, miss; but I have come West to seek my fortune."

"And I live East, and have come West to seek my father, who is a miner somewhere near Flush City, or Sports' Paradise, as I believe it is also called."

I have no one to care for me at home, and having just finished boarding-school, came out here to join papa, who has 'struck it rich' as he calls it, but he does not know of my coming."

"This is a hard country, miss, for such as you are to come to."

"I will gladly do all in my power for you, as I am going to Sports' Paradise myself."

"My name is Donald King, miss."

"And my name is Isabel Drew, and I hope we will be friends, for I owe much to you, sir, more than I can ever repay," and the tears came into the beautiful eyes.

At a slow pace the stage held on through the darkness, for Kingdon well knew the danger, as he had never been over the road.

The young lady, unused to such scenes, was delighted at the romance of the situation, and she admired his splendid driving, while, having killed two of the road-agents and checked the runaway team as he had, Kingdon became her hero.

It was after midnight when the coach reached the station, and the agent was growing anxious.

In a few words Kingdon told his story, one to suit himself:

"We were held-up a couple of miles beyond Devil's Leap, and by half a dozen road-knights."

"Doc Dunning, your driver, fired upon them, very foolishly I thought, and was at once shot in return, and a sprung upon the box and seized what appeared to me to be a bag of gold."

"I fired then and killed two men, the horses ran away, and I had to get upon the box as they ran, and check them, for I was inside."

"Doc Dunning was alive, but dying, and he told me to stop them before reaching Devil's Leap."

"I did so, and when we got there he was dead."

"The young lady had fainted, and I had trouble in bringing her to, and then she came in upon the box with me, and here we are."

"Your name, stranger, for I wishes to know a man as has the grit you showed," said the station boss.

"My name is Donald King, and I am going to Flush City to settle."

"You looks like a sport clean through."
"I gamble when I can get no work to my liking."

"Will you drive the old cart on through?"

"Yes, if you wish it."

"I does, for we has no one here."

"But them Satan's cubs got ther metal, you says?"

"Yes, they got the bag of gold, as I supposed it was."

"They got a rich haul, for there was just ten thousand in that bag, and we thought we'd get it through all right."

"But we didn't."

"Now, get some supper, for you and ther leddy, and git along on ther road, as you is behind; but that hain't your fault, for how you got through as you did is a miracle from 'way-back."

Half an hour after, holding the reins over a fresh team of horses, and with Isabel Drew again seated by his side, Donald King started on the Overland Trail to Flush City, and he flattered himself that he was going to enter the town under most favorable circumstances, having proven himself a hero even among those wild men of the mines.

CHAPTER V.

THE "SPORTS" PARADISE.

LYING in a valley, intersected with several streams more or less pretentious, and surrounded by range after range of mountains, was a mining-camp known as "Sports' Paradise."

The camp stretched along the valley for a couple of miles, rude cabins being scattered here and there, some standing alone, and others grouped together, the latter presenting the appearance of a hen with a brood of chickens, where one large structure would be surrounded by smaller ones.

The larger structure was almost invariably a lodging house, combining also the saloon and gambling room, and called by a stretch of the imagination, a hotel.

To the largest of these groups, and the largest structure in the valley, the stage driven by Kent Kingdon made its way early the morning following the death of Doc Dunning, the driver, at his post of duty.

This hotel was the end of that line of the Overland Trail, and the camp of Sports' Paradise was a rough place indeed, for there was neither law nor Gospel to be found in its precincts.

There the revolver and bowie-knife reigned supreme, and when not at work hunting for gold, two-thirds of the community were on a spree.

Gold Dust Hotel was by no means a comfortable abiding-place, but it was the best the camps afforded, and those not satisfied with bed or board under its roof, could go further and fare worse.

Judge Dalrymple was the landlord, and he was called "Judge Dal" for short; but what he was judge of other than liquors and dead-beat miners, no one made inquiry.

He was a man who had been long years in the mines, and was said to be rich, but no one was sure of this.

His own rooms in the hotel were comfortable, and there were a couple more also well fitted up, for the use of any stranger of distinction that might wish to pay an enormous sum for their use.

The "Judge" gave three square meals a day, and a cot to sleep on in his regular rooms, but persons had to furnish their own bedding.

He had a large run of custom, sold more poor liquor than all the other "hotels" in the valley together, and did a thriving business in gambling in his spacious saloon in which was situated the bar.

On the morning in question there were few persons about the Gold Dust doors.

The miners were mostly all at work, but there were a few idlers about, waiting to see the stage come in and wondering how it was that Doc Dunning, always on time, was several hours late.

The judge came out upon the piazza for the twentieth time and cast a look up the valley, where he expected to see the stage come out of the canyon and roll swiftly toward the hotel.

"Something has happened, pards," he said, addressing the crowd in a general sort of way.

"Yes, I thought them cursed road-agents had kept quiet about long enough!"

"I guess they have hit Doc this trip, and I only hopes thay hain't kilt him, for I doesn't know a man as c'd drive a hearse over them

mountains by night, as he kin!" said the stage boss, a burly, ugly-looking fellow, but withal a kindly smile in his eyes.

"There she comes!"

A perfect chorus of voices shouted the words, and their eyes were upon the stage, which, drawn by its six horses, just came in sight out of the canyon at the head of the valley.

As it drew nearer, coming along at a good pace, some one called out: "Doc's got a gal on the box with him!"

"Maybe he's married," said another.

"Yas, that's why he's abind time."

"Doc's a sly coon," and so on ran the remarks of the crowd, until Judge Dal called out: "Pards, that is not Doc Dunning on the box."

A closer look was now taken, and all were convinced that the judge was right.

Then too the stage had passed the spot where Doc always sounded his bugle-notes, to announce his coming, and no sound had been heard.

But a moment after, clear, ringing and well played there sounded the bugle, which Doc Dunning, who played on the instrument, having once heard an army bugle, always used instead of a stage-horn.

There was a ring to the bugle, an artistic manner of playing it, which Doc Dunning had never equaled, and the idlers looked at each other in surprise.

It is useless to say that it was Kent Kingdon playing the bugle, for he was a fine performer on the cornet and several other instruments.

As the stage halted at the door all eyes were bent upon his bold, handsome face, and the beautiful girl by his side.

"Who is Shasta Tom here?" asked Kent Kingdon quietly, glancing over the upturned faces.

"I am," said the station boss, stepping forward.

"I have to report to you, that beyond the Devil's Leap we were attacked by half a score of road-agents, and your driver fired upon them."

"I was inside with this lady, and also opened fire upon the robbers, killing two, as they sprung upon the box and the driver, and robbed the stage of a bag of gold."

"The horses ran away, when Dunning was wounded, and I clambered up on the box and checked them, and brought the coach in here."

"The poor driver is dead in the coach."

The story was coolly told, and it made an impression, and Kent Kingdon was sure of a hearty reception.

The station boss asked him a few questions, after he had aided Isabel Drew to dismount and enter the hotel, and he answered them with the air of a man who was used to scenes of danger and bloodshed.

No one doubted the entire truth of his story, and the body of Doc Dunning was taken into a room in the hotel to await burial, while Kent Kingdon made himself more solid with the crowd, for many had now arrived, by asking all to take a drink, in which, however, he did not join them.

"Are you a miner, pard?" asked Shasta Tom, gazing admiringly upon him.

"I have come out here to hunt gold, pard."

"Where from?"

"Texas."

"I guesses you is educated then, coming as you does from them parts."

"I am no fool."

"Your hands don't look like they'd do much heavy work."

"The gold-hunting I do will not hurt my hands," was the significant reply.

"And yet you did what no other man in these camps could do, now Doc's gone, when you brought that old coach through the mountains by night."

"It was a rough drive, but I understand handling the ribbons."

"Could I bargain with you to drive back again to where you can get a man to fill Doc's place?"

"If you have no one to go, I will do so with pleasure, to help you out; but for the trip only."

"I'll ask no more, for one of the men at the main line can take her then, and come through by day over the last part of the trail until he learns the way well."

"How many road-agents did you say ther was, pard?"

"I saw seven, and killed two."

"You're a trump; but they got the gold?"

"Yes; it was while fighting to save it that Doc Dunning lost his life."

"Oh, he's a brave one; but you be too."

"What's yer handle, pard?"

"Donald King."

"And is ther pretty lady your wife?"

"No, I never saw her until I took the stage to this place."

"She has come here to seek her father; but now I'll hunt something to eat."

"Here's the judge, and I'll interdooce yer," and Shasta Tom took pride in introducing to the landlord:

"My friend, Donald King, jedge, and a man clean through."

CHAPTER VI.

A MINER'S STORY.

ISABEL DREW's sweet face at once won the hearts of all who saw her, rough as many of her admirers were, and the judge gave her the very best room in the hotel.

The next best Kent Kingdon engaged for himself, and told the judge to spare no pains and expense in fitting them up.

He also told the judge that the young lady was under his protection, and to care for her to the best of his ability.

He had urged Isabel not to speak of the nature of her business in coming to Sports' Paradise, but to leave all in his hands, and he would find her father for her, commencing the search as soon as he returned from driving the stage back to where another driver could be obtained.

The next day he rolled out of Sports' Paradise seated on the box, and was sent off on his long and dangerous drive by rousing cheers from the crowd, who had set him down as "no tender-foot," but a hero.

He raised his slouch hat politely, and glancing over his shoulder saw Isabel at the window waving her hand to him.

"That is a maiden to win hearts."

"She'll be useful to me," he muttered, and he sent his horses along at a swift pace.

The hours passed by and he was in the very heart of the mountains when suddenly he saw a man appear in the trail before him.

He quickly drew rein, for he at once set the man down as a road-agent.

But the stranger, doubtless understanding that he was regarded with suspicion, raised his hands above his head, as though to show he had no evil intention.

Driving on slowly, Kent Kingdon called out:

"Ho, pard, is it peace or war?"

"Peace every time, pard, for I wants to ride with you," was the answer.

The stranger, Kent Kingdon saw, was a miner, and one who looked like an honest, hard-working man.

"Get up with me, then," he said, and the man clambered up to a seat on the box, while, glancing at the handsome, well-dressed driver, he said:

"You is a sport to handle the ribbons, for you looks it."

In a few words Kent Kingdon told how it was that he was driving the coach, and the man asked:

"Did you say the gal had come out here to look for her father?"

"Yes."

"Now I'm agoin' East to see a gal whose father is my pard, and who is a-dying with consumption and wants her to come out and see him."

"He left her at school in York State, and he's struck it rich and has got a big pile o' dust laid away and only the gal to leave it to, and he wants his darter to come and see him afore he dies, and so I goes arter her."

"And your friend, did you leave him alone in his cabin?"

"Yas, for he kin take keer o' himself until I gets back, as he's able to git about, and I left food and wood in plenty for him."

"What is his name, pard?"

"David Drew."

Kent Kingdon started.

The maiden's name was Isabel Drew, he remembered.

"And his daughter's name?"

"He called her Belle, but his letter to her is addressed to Miss Isabel Drew."

"Ah!" and the adventurer smiled serenely, for matters seemed to be going his way.

"You say he has struck it rich?"

"Yes, pard, and he has sent a heap might o' gold to be deposited in the bank, and wrote to his lawyers and sent his will, leaving the gal all he has dug out o' the mine; but he wants to see her all the same, and kiss her afore he dies, so as he were worrying over it, I just said as how I'd take the stage to the nearest railroad and then whoop it East, and come back bringing the gal with me."

"So he writ the letter to his darter and I have it here, and will fetch her back with me."

"And his name was David Drew?" asked Kent Kingdon.

"Yas."

Kingdon remembered that Isabel Drew had told him that such was her father's name.

He was a miner, had written her that he was doing well, and had given her every advantage of education, sparing no money to make her an accomplished woman.

His writing that he was in good health and having completed her school days, had caused her to determine to seek him in the border wilds, and she had boldly made the venture.

Such was the situation of affairs that caused Kent Kingdon to feel that the man the miner referred to was none other than Isabel Drew's father.

He drove on in silence for some little time while the loquacious miner talked on.

He did not see the cold, cruel expression coming over the face of the man who so skillfully sent the six horses along the mountain trail.

At last Kingdon asked:

"Have you the letter with you pard?"

"Oh yes, and, in case of accidents, for life is uncert'n, I has the maps of the way to reach the cabin whar Dave Drew and me hangs out, so the gal could get a guide to take her there, should I slip out, and a copy was sent to the lawyers also."

"I see; but have you no near neighbors?"

"None; we is in a canyon whar no one crowds us, and we doesn't want ter be."

"I suppose you have struck it rich also?"

"Waaf, I has a paying lead, but I hopes to find it pan out big. You see, Dave Drew was a-workin' his mine long afore I met him, and one day he come down to the camps to git food and some o' the boys sot onto him, and I helped him out o' ther scrape. So I jist lighted out with him for his ranch and we has been pards ever since."

Kingdon made no immediate reply; but coming to an ugly piece of road he drew rein and said:

"Pard, may I ask you to check up that middle horse for me as I'm a little lame and can't dismount easily?"

"You bet I will," and the miner clambered down to the ground and approached the horse referred to.

His hand was upon the check-rein, when there came a sharp report, and with a groan the miner sunk in his tracks.

The horses were startled by the report, but they were quickly reined in by Kingdon, who soon quieted them down, and sprung from the box with no show of being lame.

He at once approached the miner, and saw that the bullet had cut its way into his head.

The man was stone dead.

Quickly the cruel man examined his victim's clothes, and drew from his pockets a letter and bundle of papers.

Under his belt of arms was a buckskin belt containing a good supply of gold.

This Kingdon buckled about his own waist, and drawing one of the revolvers of the dead man, aimed two shots at the coach and fired.

Then he placed the letter and papers in his pocket, put the dead man in the coach, and mounting the box once more, drove on at a swift pace.

He had developed into a common murderer, and had determined to play a bold game for gold.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MINER'S LETTER.

WHEN Kent Kingdon arrived at the stage station he had a tale to tell, and one which gave him extra fame as a hero.

A highwayman had suddenly appeared on the trail, he said, and fired upon him.

There were two bullet-marks upon the coach to prove that the shots had come dangerously near the handsome driver.

Then there was the body of the trail robber to show that Kent Kingdon's return fire had been deadly.

There was no one at the station who knew the alleged robber, and so he was quickly buried, while Kingdon presented the station boss with his belt of arms.

Then he drove on his way, and for the rest of the trail to the point where he was to take the coach, he had company, for several miners went along as passengers.

Arriving at the end of the line, the story was told over again, and all admired the dashing,

handsome man who had proven himself "a terror," as he was called.

Curley Kit, a fine-looking young driver of the Overland, was told by the stage boss to take the place of Doc Dunning, and the coach started on its return to Sports' Paradise with Kent Kingdon on the box with him.

As they passed the scene of the two tragedies, Kingdon pointed them out to Curley Kit, and at the request of the young driver, related the story of the road-agents' attack near Devil's Leap, and of the pretended holding-up of the coach by the miner.

Without adventure the coach reached Sports' Paradise, and the miners of that wild town gave Kingdon a grand welcome.

There was something in the calm dignity of the man, his conscious power, that won their respect, while he was dreaded from the first as one whom it would be safe not to meddle with.

Judge Dal greeted him warmly, and told him that he had given Isabel Drew the use of a horse to ride, while she could go from one end of the valley camps to the other and meet with only the greatest respect.

"She has told me, Pard King, that she came out here to look up her father, and, as you are a stranger in these parts, I'll make inquiries about him."

"No need of it, judge, for to-morrow I shall myself begin the search of all the camps, and if he is among them I will find him," was the reply.

"Well, you know best, Pard King, and she's in your charge," was the reply of the landlord of the Flu-h Hotel, calling Kingdon by his assumed name of Donald King.

Arranging his attire with great care, Kingdon then sought Isabel Drew, who had just come in from a ride among the camps, and told her that he had met an old miner who gave him an idea of where her father could be found, as there was a person of that name living far up in the mountains.

"I will go there to-morrow on horseback, Miss Drew, and should it prove to be your father will bring him back with me."

"You are so kind, Mr. King, and I do not know how to thank you; but are you not losing your time in helping me?"

"Oh no, for my time is my own, and I am prospecting here in this country to discover if I can find a paying mine to purchase."

"You think that I had better not accompany you?"

"By no means, as the country is dangerous, and you would find no accommodations off of the stage line and away from Sports' Paradise."

"I leave all to you, Mr. King, and again I thank you," and Isabel Drew held out her hand to the man who was plotting then in his evil heart against her.

The next day, mounted upon a splendid horse, and thoroughly armed, Kent Kingdon set out upon his search for the lonely cabin of Dave Drew.

The map which he had gave him an idea of the locality where the cabin was situated, and so he went directly to the point where he had met the old miner.

He reached the spot where he had shot the miner, and passed the scene with no show that bitter memories of his cruel act were crowding upon him.

Turning into the mountains from off the Overland Trail, he went on until he came to a good camping-place.

The sun was yet an hour high, when he staked his horse out on the banks of a swiftly running stream, and selected a spot for his bed for the night.

Having gathered a pile of wood, spread his blankets and lighted his fire, he sat down and took from his pocket the map and letter which he had robbed the miner of.

"I am about twenty miles, as I figure it out, from Drew's cabin," he said to himself, as he studied out the locality on the map.

"Now to see what this letter says."

The letter he took from his pocket was in a "home-made" envelope, manufactured out of a sheet of foolscap paper and sealed with flour paste.

It was addressed in a hand that appeared to be tremulous, to

"Miss Isabel Drew,

"Ogdensburg,

"New York.

"Presented by

"Dan'l Kennedy, Esq."

Opening the clumsy envelope, Kingdon read, written in the same hand:

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER:—

"The bearer of this letter to you is my comrade and true friend, a fellow-miner, of whom I have before written you as being my mining partner.

"On account of the great difficulty of getting a letter mailed to you, I have not written often, and yet I have longed to do so.

"I have felt that you had about finished your education at Vassar, and would have returned to the old home of Cousin Jane, in Ogdensburg, until you heard from me.

"I had hoped ere this to have joined you there, and purchased for you a house all your own, so that we could dwell together in happiness the days I had yet to live, for I have prospered beyond all expectations.

"But now, when I should start to return to you, I feel myself unable to do so.

"The truth is, my dear child, I have overworked myself, and I am now too weak to travel, in fact, to hide nothing from you, I am failing steadily, and so I send this letter to you, hoping you will come to me.

"Dan will be your guide, and I will pay the expenses of Cousin Jane and her son if they will also accompany you, for this is a dread country for you to come to alone.

"I have sent to attorneys in New York my will and important papers bearing upon things I wished settled, and told them you would call upon them some day.

"I have deposited in several banks, which they know of, large sums in my name, but which will be changed, to your credit as depositor, for the money is your fortune.

"All these things I can explain to you, and will, for I cannot write, so I urge you to come to me at once, as delay is dangerous.

"Dan leaves me well-supplied, and I am able to look after myself until you get here, which I hope will be within two weeks from this writing.

"I have here also, hidden away, which Dan even does not know the hiding-place of, a large amount of gold-dust, also yours.

"I would not urge you, my dear Belle, to come here, did I not wish you to see me before I died, for I well know I cannot last much longer.

"I prepared you, in my last letter of several months ago, that my health was failing, so that you will nerve yourself to hear the worst.

"Come at once, alone if you must, and trust Dan Kennedy in everything, for he is true and faithful.

"I can write no more, and hoping to see you before long,

"Your ever loving father,

"DAVID DREW."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE TRAIL.

THE letter from David Drew to his daughter seemed to deeply impress Kent Kingdon, for he read it over several times, and then sat in deep meditation, the firelight gleaming upon his face and revealing a strange expression there.

He sat for a long time thus, and at last his thoughts found vent in words.

"How strange that Fate is aiding me as it is!

"I am a fugitive, not daring to make myself known, for those good Puritans in the East would surely hang me for killing Horace Manners, though our duel was a fair one.

"Ill fortune dogged my steps for awhile, but now the tide has changed, for I have met in Isabel Drew a most lovely creature. I played my game boldly in the affair with the road-agents, and have gotten the treasure-box the coach carried safely hidden away.

"Then Isabel looks upon me as a guardian, and meeting the old miner, Kennedy, has just made me master of the situation.

"There are two paths open to me, and one is, if I find David Drew alive, to tell him Kennedy was shot, and in dying trusted me with the letter to his daughter, who, by a strange coincidence, I had just taken to Sports' Paradise, and so came to see him, but would return for Isabel and bring her to him.

"This would place me in his confidence, and in hers; but the fact is, I dare not return East, as she would desire to go at once, and I might not win her for my wife.

"Thereby I would lose old Drew's gold, for his attorneys would remember me, doubtless, under my own name, as the duel is not forgotten.

"I can, on the other hand, see that Drew dies soon after giving me all the information he can, and then I can return and marry Isabel.

"I will not decide yet awhile, but wait until I reach the cabin of Drew and he governed by circumstances."

With this decision, he coolly lay down to sleep away the hours of the night, as though he had not an atom of conscience.

Bright and early he arose, cooked his breakfast and started upon the way to the cabin of the miner, after having again closely studied the map he had.

His life on the Texan prairies had made him a skillful plainsman, and he had no difficulty in finding trails and reading signs of woodcraft.

It was before noon that he entered the wild mountain canyon where the map showed the cabin to be situated.

No other habitation was near, and as he approached a small cabin built at the head of the canyon upon a slope, and under the shelter of overhanging rocks, he was startled by the hoarse barking of a dog.

Riding up to the cabin he found the door open, and a huge dog was standing in the doorway.

The bark he gave, however, was one of welcome, rather than anger, and as Kingdon dismounted, he came whining to his side.

"What is it, old fellow?" Kingdon said, in a kindly voice, and he hastily followed the dog into the cabin.

There were two rooms within, one used for sleeping, and in it were two beds, the other as a kitchen and sitting-room, and they were by no means uncomfortable.

Upon one bed lay a human form.

It was of a man passed the meridian of life, with long gray hair and beard and a face that was greatly emaciated.

The form was very thin, and the whole indication was that the man was dying, or perhaps dead.

Kingdon hastily approached and bent over him.

Then he saw that he was breathing; but the sunken eyes were closed, and that the poor sufferer could not last long was evident.

"My friend, wake up and speak to me," said Kingdon, softly.

The eyes slowly opened, and the lips moved, yet no sound came from them.

"You are David Drew, are you not?"

There was a movement of the head, as though to answer in the affirmative, but there came no word from the lips.

Going to his waiting horse, Kingdon took from his saddle a flask of brandy.

It was full, showing that he had not tasted it himself.

Placing a small quantity in a tin cup of fresh water, from the brook near by, he went back into the cabin and gave it to the dying man to drink.

The eyes looked the thanks the lips could not utter, and a wan smile passed over the face.

For a moment it seemed as though the dying man would revive and speak; but though the struggle was a hard one, the effort was useless, and the eyes again closed, the breathing became shorter, and the minutes passed slowly by.

Not daring to leave the side of the man who was hovering upon the brink of death, fearing that he might yet speak to him and betray some secret he longed to know, Kingdon allowed his horse to remain all saddled as he was, and kept close to the bedside.

Thus the hours passed away, and night came on.

About midnight there was a sound of hoarse breathing from the lips of David Drew, and soon after the eyes opened and were fixed upon the face of Kent Kingdon.

It was a beseeching, longing look, and the lips quivered nervously.

But it was the last look upon the earth David Drew ever gave, as a moment after the eyes closed forever under the seal of death that was set upon them.

CHAPTER IX.

TOLD BY LYING LIPS.

FOR some moments did Kent Kingdon stand regarding the dead man, and a look of cruel disappointment was upon his face.

"I should have been sooner, for then he would have told me all.

"But now, Kennedy's lips are sealed, as well as David Drew's," and I may not be able to discover all that I should know.

"But a search to-morrow may reveal all.

"Now I will seek the rest I need."

Going out of the cabin he unsaddled his patient horse and staked him out to feed, and then threw several large logs upon the fire to give a bright light in the cabin, for the spot was a weird one, the scene calculated to impress one deeply.

Making up a bed of blankets in the other room he sought rest; but his dreams were disturbed, and the howling of the dog, who seemed to know that his master was dead, was certainly not calculated to soothe the slumbers of a man whose conscience held the secrets that were in the brain and heart of Kent Kingdon.

Rising early he found that it had come on to storm and the day was scarcely less gloomy than the night.

But he went forth to dig a grave and selected

a pretty spot near a lofty tree upon the banks of the brook.

The body was then wrapped in furs and placed in the grave, and into the smooth bark of the tree Kingdon cut with skillful hand the name and date of death of the dead man.

Then he made a thorough search of the cabin, hoping to find gold.

And gold he did find, but only a few hundreds worth of the precious dust tied up in a bag.

If there was more, if there were papers of value he could not find them; but he had taken watch and ring from the body before he buried it, and these he knew would be proof of the fact that David Drew was dead, for the letter written to Isabel he cared not to show.

That night the storm increased in fury, and the rain descended in torrents until after dawn, and Kent Kingdon bitterly cursed the elements, as he knew that any trace of a trail to the gold mine would be washed out, so as to be beyond the finding of a man who had no idea of its locality.

"Isabel will know the name of the lawyers, so I will not worry," he said after awhile.

"I will try and find the mine, not only Drew's, but Kennedy's and if I cannot, the money in the banks will be a handsome sum.

"I'll marry the girl, and then pretend to find this letter, so that she can go East and see the attorneys and get the money.

"With what I got from the miner Kennedy, have found here and the ten thousand in the stage coach treasure-box I have hidden away near the Overland Trail, I will not be so bad off, and what Drew has left in the banks for his daughter will make me rich, so I will not worry," he said in his grim way of musing aloud.

The search the next day for the mines was fruitless.

He could find no trace of a trail leading from the cabin in any direction, and he was forced to give up the hunt.

Closing the cabin securely he mounted his horse and started upon the trail back to Sports' Paradise.

On the way he went to where he had hidden the treasure-bags taken from the coach, and these he carried with him, timing his arrival at the Flush Hotel so as to reach there late at night.

Landlord Dalrymple was just retiring, and said quickly:

"Glad to see you back, pard.

"Any news for the girl?"

"Yes."

"Indeed I am glad, for her sake, as she is the sweetest girl I ever saw."

"I found her father working in the mountains, and I'll take her to him to-morrow; but I am awful tired, so will go to my room," and he made his way there, hiding his gold beneath his blankets and traps.

The next day he sought Isabel and after her warm greeting of him said:

"Miss Isabel, are you ready for a trip into the mountains?"

"Yes, indeed, for your face tells me you have news for me," she replied eagerly.

"I have; but I will only say how that I have found the dwelling place of your father, and I will take you there.

"We will start at dawn to-morrow, so as to go there in one day."

The maiden was rejoiced and thanked him over and over again, and, bright and early the following morning was ready to start.

Kingdon took a pack-horse along with them, to carry what they would need, as they said they would doubtless be away for some days, and they started off together just as the east was growing crimson under the approach of the sun.

The ride was a long one, and a hard one; but Isabel was hopeful of soon seeing her father, and said over and over again that she felt no fatigue.

She was anxious to know all about her father, and how Kingdon had discovered him; but he said that he would only tell her all when they drew near the cabin.

Late in the afternoon he halted and said:

"Miss Isabel, I will now tell you just how I found your father, and it was by the merest accident, as you will see.

"I went to a mining-camp where, just before my arrival, there had been a fight, and a man was fatally wounded.

"I knew the man, and his name was Dan Kennedy, and he told me that he was on his way to the East to find a young lady and fetch her back with him.

"He said that he had a partner in the moun-

tains, and that it was his daughter that he was going after, for his comrade was a very sick man."

"Did you say that his name was Dan Kennedy, Mr. King?" asked Isabel.

"Yes."

"My father's mining-partner was named Dan Kennedy."

"You are right, for he was the man, and your father was very ill, for he told me that he was going to Ogdensburg, New York State, to seek you, and fetch you to your father, who, I regret to say, was dying."

A groan came from the tightly-closed lips of the maiden, and she seemed unable to speak, but looked at the man as though beseeching him to tell her more.

"I regret to say," continued Kingdon, "that before Kennedy could tell me much more he died; but he told me how to find the cabin in the mountains, and thither I went, as soon as I had decently buried the old miner."

"And my father?"

"I found him, as Kennedy had said, dying."

Isabel Drew bowed her head in silence, while her form quivered with emotion.

"I would suffer any sorrow, Miss Isabel, rather than inflict suffering upon you, and—"

"My father is dead?" she gasped.

"Yes."

"I feared it; but tell me all?"

"I found him dying, and almost gone; but I revived him with a little brandy, and told him how I had met Kennedy and that you were then at Sports' Paradise.

"For awhile I thought he would rally, and that I could go and fetch you to him; but the improvement was but momentary, and he was only able to ask me to fetch you to his grave, and to give into your hands his belongings, while I must tell you that his attorneys, whose names he did not tell me, held for you certain money, as you were his heiress.

"I stood by his bedside, Miss Isabel, until he died, and with his last breath he bade me be as a brother to you, and I so pledged myself to be.

"Thus he died, with my hand clasping his, and the next day I buried him near his cabin.

"Locking up his little home, and leaving his dog inside, for I left food for him, I at once returned to tell you all and to fetch you to the spot where he had so long dwelt.

"See, here are his watch and ring, each bearing his name, and all else that he left is in the cabin and belongs to you."

She held out her hand in silence, and too much overcome to speak, rode on with Kent Kingdon to the home of her dead father.

CHAPTER X.

THE PLEDGE.

THE sun was yet an hour high when Kent Kingdon and his fair companion came in sight of the canyon, in the upper end of which was the home of the dead miners Drew and Kennedy.

For years had Isabel Drew been separated from her father, in fact she had not seen him since she was a young girl.

Then, too, his letters had been few and far between, and hence her love for him was not as deep as though they had been constantly together.

Dear to her he was, and she had looked forward to their being happy in their own home together in the future, for she knew, from his letters that he was prospering.

Finishing school, and alarmed regarding his health, she had boldly taken the long, and dangerous trip to the frontier to hunt him up.

But she had come too late, and had to mourn him dead.

Her cousin, Jane Drew whom she called "Auntie," as she was a woman of middle age, she did not particularly like, and, excepting a few school friends she had no dear ties and felt utterly alone in the world.

Under such circumstances it was not to be wondered at that she clung to Kent Kingdon as the one nearest and dearest to her.

She had been struck with his splendid appearance when he had raised his hat to her, that day of their meeting at the stage station.

He had afterward proven himself such a hero, was so different from the beaux whom she had met, was so kind to her, gentle as a woman, brave as a lion, that she had found herself falling desperately in love with him.

Then being thrown together as they were, his having heard, as he said, the last words of her dying father, made him still dearer to her; and when she dismounted at the cabin and he led her to the grave, above which was the inscription.

he had cut into the tree, she burst into tears and when he held forth his arm to support her, she leant her head upon his breast and wept like a child.

At length he said to her soothing words, and led her away to the cabin, where the dog, when the door was opened, gave her a warm welcome by barks and caresses.

In a short while Kent Kingdon had her father's room prepared for her, a fire burned on the large hearth, and the man, with real culinary skill began to prepare supper, while she and the dog roamed about at will.

When, at dark, she entered the cabin and saw all that he had done, she said, feelingly:

"I thank you, oh, so much, for your goodness to me.

"But I am calm now, and I will do my share of the work and let you look after our poor tired horses."

He did as she asked him, and then the two had supper together—the maiden, with a man she believed true and noble to lean upon, becoming calm and having no dread of evil.

The things in the cabin were looked over, and Isabel remembered well her father's ring and watch, but, as before, no papers were found, only the gold which Kingdon had discovered, and nothing else.

Several days thus passed at the cabin, and each day had been spent in searching for the mines, but without avail, and Isabel Drew said:

"Well, I have some money saved up, which father sent Auntie Jane for me, and with this I will be quite rich; but I will return East and go to work, teaching, I guess, as I am best fitted for that."

"Your father has doubtless sent money East, and left it in the hands of his agents, or lawyers, and this would be yours," suggested Kingdon.

"Yes, he must have done so, for I remember that he did send gold to pay off his debts, after his failure, but I do not remember who his lawyers are."

"Your aunt doubtless does."

"Yes, she certainly will know, and, after all, I may be an heiress," and a sad smile crossed the beautiful face.

"But I would rather be poor, and have poor papa back to love me, than be rich and alone in the world, as I am."

They were standing by the grave of her father as she spoke, and her beautiful eyes filled with tears as she glanced down upon the newly-made mound, upon which she had planted wild flowers.

"Isabel, you need not be alone in the world."

As Kent Kingdon spoke he took her hand, and as she glanced up into his face he continued, in a low, impassioned tone:

"Isabel, you have known me but a short while, but, from the moment I saw you, I loved you."

"My life has been a strange one, and I would hide nothing from you."

"My home was in Texas, and my father was a rich cattle-king."

"But he failed, died, and I was left without means."

"At this time I was forced into a duel with a fellow-student, for I was at college, and though I spared his life at first, I was forced to kill him."

"I at once became a wanderer and sought this frontier."

"Here I have made money, and I can make you a comfortable home."

"I am a gambler, yes, and yet I am not a bad man."

"You see that I hide nothing from you."

"I stood by the side of your father when he died, and pledged myself to care for you as a brother would."

"Yet it is not as a brother that I love you, Isabel, for I would make you my wife."

"You say that you have no tie to bind you to others, and here, by the side of your father's grave, I ask you to pledge yourself to be my wife."

"Let me make you happy, Isabel, and no shadow will I ever bring upon your life."

"Will you pledge yourself, Isabel, to be my wife upon our return to Sports' Paradise, for there is a clergyman there in the camps, and he can unite us."

She had listened with the deepest attention to all that he had said, and her manner was almost one of awe.

But her heart had been gladdened by his words, for she already loved him dearly, and to have given him up then would have been a bitter sorrow to her.

"I do love you, Mr. King, and I will pledge

myself as you ask, for I believe that you care for me, and I will teach you to love me more."

"I am so desolate, so alone in the world, and you have been so good to me, I know that I can trust you."

"And you give me your pledge to marry me on our return to Sports' Paradise?"

"Yes," and she placed her hand in his, for her honest heart did not read the guilt in his.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR INTERRUPTION.

THE community of Sports' Paradise was considerably shaken up when it was announced that there was to be a wedding in their midst.

In fact the mining-camps were shaken to their very center by the startling tidings.

The particularly curious thing about a wedding in Sports' Paradise was that there was no one to marry.

A few miners had brought their wives with them there, half a score of children were to be seen in the camps, and these were the only ones to give an idea of home life.

There had been funerals in plenty—in fact it was the exception for one not to occur daily.

Then there were fights, gambling, horse-racing and stag dances; but a marriage, never.

Kent Kingdon had returned to Sports' Paradise and made known to Judge Dal that he intended to marry the young lady, Miss Drew.

He told the judge that he had found the father of the maiden in a dying condition, and, as Isabel had no one to turn to, he had asked her to be his wife, and that she had consented.

"Now, Pard King, you are playing in great luck, for I'd have asked her to marry me, if you had not done so," said the judge.

"Well, judge, we are to be married within the month, and I'll give all the boys a grand blow-out, so lay in your stores accordingly."

"Now tell me if there is not a preacher in the camps?"

"There's the man we call old Death's Head and Cross Bones, on account of his deathlike face, and because he always walks with his hands crossed over his breast."

"Is he really a preacher?"

"Oh, yes, he came here to convert the boys, and used to hold preachin' every Sunday until he struck it rich one day, and since then he devotes more time to digging for dust than saving souls."

"What is his real name?"

"Parson Prim he called himself when he came, but the boys call him Parson Death's Head, and Preacher Cross Bones, as I told you."

"I will see him to-morrow, and he can marry us, while you will give the bride away."

"I'll do it, though I hate to, seeing as I'm in love with her myself; but then you are a handsome fellow, Pard King, game to the backbone, and just the fellow to win a pretty girl for a wife, so I gives in."

"And to protect her, too," was the significant reply.

"I believe you; but she'll need no other protection in these camps than her innocent face; but now tell me when it's to be and I'll have all in readiness, and the few miners' wives there are in Sports' Paradise will help the lady out in her bridal fixings."

"By Jove, but I believe the boys will go clean mad over a wedding; but do you intend to live right along with us, Pard King?"

"As long as there is gold to win," was the reply, and Kent Kingdon mounted his horse and rode out into the canyons, to find the cabin of the miner parson.

So great was the contrast between her splendid, handsome lover and those about him, that Isabel Drew never tired of admiring the man that had so unexpectedly and strangely come into her life.

He was polished in manner, had been reared a gentleman, was so gentle to her, so kind, that each day she found herself more and more infatuated with him.

She had written to her aunt, telling of her father's death, and had spoken of the great kindness to her of a "Mr. Donald King," whose deeds she had told of in glowing terms.

She had asked her aunt to let her know the names of her father's lawyers, or attorneys, and yet not a word had she said about coming home, or of her being engaged to be married to a man whom she hardly knew.

In another letter she had dwelt more at length upon "Mr. Donald King," and had hinted that his kindness to her had won her heart.

But she did not speak of coming home, and asked her aunt to write to her where she then was until further instructions.

Those in Sports' Paradise did not look upon it as remarkable that Isabel Drew should marry Kent Kingdon upon so short an acquaintance, for they considered it but natural that she should fall in love with the handsome stranger in their midst, and all of the young miners envied him his beautiful sweetheart, and all prepared to attend the wedding in full force, rigged out in the best clothes that the meager stores of Sports' Paradise would furnish.

That Kent Kingdon had established himself as a gambler in the town, Isabel did not know, for no one seemed to think it anything against him, or to care to tell her if they did.

She did not know, therefore, that he had quickly won the name of the "Card King," on account of his almost phenomenal luck at cards, and that each night, after leaving her to go to her room, he would go to the saloon of the Flush Hotel and gamble for hours at a time.

The few women in the camps had become most deeply interested in the young girl; they were her friends from the start, and were happy in the thought that there was to be a wedding in Sports' Paradise, and they offered their services in preparing the bride's trousseau.

Isabel took all their kind acts as they were meant; but she told them, as she had come prepared to stay a long time on the border, she had brought her trunk and was most thoroughly supplied with all that she needed, but would be glad to have them attend her on the day of her marriage.

This set the good women to plotting to rig themselves out in their best, and the stores were hunted over for all that could add to their costumes on the festive occasion.

When at last the evening set for the wedding came around, Sports' Paradise was a scene of great excitement.

Never before had the miners been so decked out, and as for the few women and children in the camp, they were dazzling in their costumes.

Every miner had taken an oath on his spade and pick not to drink a drop until after the wedding, and then they were to make up for lost time.

Parson Prim was on hand, solemn, silent and sepulchral-looking.

He was dressed in his old suit of black, which was worn threadbare, and wore a white tie made out of a cotton handkerchief.

When all was in readiness the bridal party came out upon the piazza, where lamps had been placed, and the crowd had assembled in front of the hotel on the ground.

First came the parson, then the judge, with Isabel upon his arm, and she looked very beautiful in the pretty dress that she wore, though she was very pale.

The miners' wives followed, as "bridesmaids" they said, and then the deep voice of the parson broke the stillness that was upon all, and he began the ceremony that was to make Isabel Drew the wife of Donald King, as he was called.

But half a dozen words had he uttered, when there came suddenly an unexpected interruption to the services, for a loud voice called out:

"Hold on, there, Preacher Pard, for I objects to this marriage!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERIOUS MINER.

A NUMBER of the miners had noticed in the crowd, that assembled at the ceremony that was to make Isabel Drew the bride of Kent Kingdon, a young man, tall, well-formed and with a clean-shaven face.

He was dressed like a miner, was thoroughly armed and seemed to be a stranger in Sports' Paradise.

He had ridden into the camps on a splendid black horse, with trappings of the best kind, and had hitched the animal to a tree not very far from the hotel.

Who he was no one seemed to know; but he mingled with the crowd and took his stand in the front rank, right on the hotel steps, when all assembled to witness the ceremony.

It was this man who had called out that he objected to the marriage, and his ringing voice brought every eye upon him.

No one seemed more startled than Kent Kingdon, at this sudden interruption, and he turned his piercing eyes upon the stranger, while a dangerous light shone in them.

Isabel clung close to her lover, for she had not yet become accustomed to the rough ways of a mining-camp.

The parson turned upon him a melancholy look and stopped the service, while the judge was very angry at the one who dared to speak at so solemn a moment.

"By what right, sir, do you dare intrude yourself here?" sternly asked Kent Kingdon, in vain trying to recall if he knew the man.

"I'm here for a purpose, pard, and you shall know it, you bet."

"Hold on, gents, don't get excited, for I has a right to speak, as the parson has got to ask if any man 'knows cause why this man should not marry this lady,' and objections I have."

Every one heard the words, which were clearly uttered, and the eyes of the assemblage were turned now upon Kent Kingdon.

"Who are you?" calmly asked Kingdon.

"One who objects."

"To this marriage?"

"Yes."

"Upon what grounds?"

"Pard, I'm not a man to strike another in the back, and so I'll give you a chance."

"What do you mean?"

"I ask you do you love this lady?"

"I do."

"And I ask her if she loves you?"

"I do," was Isabel's firm response.

"Come, stand aside and interfere no more, or it will be the worst for you," and there was an unpleasant ring in the voice of Kent Kingdon.

"You cannot scare me, pard, with threats, for I am here for business."

"Ha! you wish trouble with me?"

"You are shouting, pard, for I tell you I object to this marriage," was the bold response.

"And why?"

"Well, I love the lady myself."

A general laugh followed this, while Kent Kingdon asked:

"Isabel, do you know this man?"

"I rode with him in the stage to the station before the one where I met you."

"There, he left the coach, and I have not seen him since."

"You have keen eyes, miss, to recognize me, for I have changed since then."

"Yes, you have cut off your mustache, and your dress is not the same," she answered.

"Well, miss, I fell in love with you, and now I know you are going to marry this man I have come to stop it."

"Stand aside, sir, or it will be the worst for you," cried Kingdon with angry vehemence.

"Keep cool, pard, and listen to my terms."

"Begone, or—"

"No, pard, he must tell all he knows against you, when I ask it, for that is regular," said the parson, in his sepulchral tones.

"All right, let him speak," and Kent Kingdon showed no sign of emotion, though in his heart he began to fear that the man was a detective upon his track.

But he knew that wild community too well not to understand that they would never allow an officer to arrest him and carry him back East, because he had killed a man in a duel.

"Well, what have you to say?" said Kingdon, impatiently.

"As I said before, pard, I don't wish to strike a man in the back, and I can hit you hard if I wish; but I'll offer you terms."

"What terms?"

"Well, I love the lady you wish to marry, and you love her."

"Well?"

"She cannot be so desperately in love with you, as she has known you so short a time, so it won't break her heart to lose you, while she doubtless knows no more about you than she does about me."

"Will you come to the point at once, sir?"

"Yes, and it is just this:

"I can break this off between you two, by saying a few words here, and get you into trouble besides; but I'll give you a chance."

"Name it," and Kent Kingdon was impressed in spite of himself by the man's manner and words.

"I offer to fight you, mounted and with revolvers, starting at fifty paces apart and spurring toward each other, emptying our revolvers as we ride, and the victor to take the bride for his wife."

"You are a fool," said Kent Kingdon.

But he saw that the bold proposition of the stranger found favor in the eyes of the miners.

As for Isabel, she shrunk back from the man and clung closer to her lover.

"Do you mean this in earnest, pard?" asked Judge Dal.

"I do," was the cool response.

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I shall make known what I know about you, and you will certainly not get the lady."

Kingdon was for the once nonplused.

He knew that elsewhere the stranger would

have been quickly thrown out of the way; but there, among those wild spirits, his daring proposition had already won favor for him.

What he knew about him, he could not guess, but he must find out in some way, and so he said:

"My friend, a word with you."

"All right, pard, step this way, but no underhand work against me."

"I am no assassin."

"Well, what have you to say?"

They walked into the hall of the hotel, Isabel remaining with the judge.

"You pretend to know me?" said Kingdon.

"I do know you."

"Who am I?"

"You go here as Donald King, but whether that is your real name or not you know best."

"Do you know me by any other?"

"Yes."

"Name it."

"Thief!"

"Ha! do you dare thus insult me?"

"Hold on, for I can draw too, pard."

"You shall fight me for that word."

"Just what I want to do, but the young lady must be the stake we fight for."

"You say you know that about me that will ruin me if you make it known?"

"I do."

"Out with it?"

"I'm a road-agent, pard," was the low spoken reply of the stranger.

"Ah! by your own confession you are a thief?"

"Yes, I was the leader of the band of toll-gatherers that stopped the stage in which you and the young lady came to this town."

"And you dare to confess it?"

"Yes, to you."

"And why to me?"

"Because, though I missed getting the gold, you got it and laid it at my door, do you see?"

Kent Kingdon started and his face paled.

"I have hit you hard, I see, so you will own up that I know just reasons why you should not marry that sweet girl."

"It is false."

"It is true, for one of my men saw you halt the coach and go into the woods with the bag of gold."

"He thought there were others in the coach, so did not go near it, but told me that night."

"I looked for the hiding-place of the treasure but could not find it, and I know that you brought it here."

"Agree to meet me, as I have said, in a duel, and under the terms I offer, and may the best man win."

"And if I refuse?"

"I shall tell what I know to the miners, and I guess your life will not be worth much then."

"And I could have you hanged too."

"No, for I would say that you accused me falsely, and I could prove that I am an honest miner in another camp."

"Enough, I agree to your terms," was the hot response.

"You are wise," and the self-confessed road-agent led the way out upon the piazza, while Kent Kingdon followed with a smile upon his face to hide his real feelings.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEATH-SHOT.

WHEN Kingdon returned to the piazza, to the surprise of every one, and especially of Isabel Drew, he said:

"My friends, this man makes a charge against me of which I am innocent, and to prove it, I am willing to risk my life in a combat with him, as he demands."

"Oh, Donald!" cried Isabel, in great alarm, and she sprung to his side.

"My sweet little girl, you need feel no dread, for I fear no man, and it will soon be over."

"No! no! no! You must not fight him!" she cried, clinging to him convulsively.

"Ah, Isabel, you do not know that I must do so, for were I to refuse I could never live a day among these people."

"But you will be killed."

"No, for I am a quick and a dead shot."

"If he is killed, miss, you are my prize, so he knows what he fights for, and I tell you I will be as good to you as he would ever be, and perhaps a great deal better."

"I love you, I am free to confess, and I risk my life to win you."

"Come, pard, yonder is my horse, and I'm ready for the fight!" and the stranger pointed to his horse hitched not far away.

It took no end of argument to convince poor Isabel that he must fight, and Kent Kingdon

had to call in the judge and others to prove to her that he would not be allowed to live in Sports' Paradise unless he did fight.

"There are scores of young fellows here, miss, who would be willing to take King's place for a smile from you," said the judge.

"I only wish that they would; but I suppose I must yield; but oh, Donald, let us leave this awful country when all is over," cried Isabel.

He bent over and kissed her, and the judge having sent around after his horse, Kent Kingdon went out of the hotel and sprung into the saddle.

The distance had already been stepped off, and the stranger was at his post.

With a fascination she could not resist, Isabel went out upon the piazza and her eyes were riveted upon the man who had become in so short a while, all in the world to her.

The crowd were wild with delight, at the unexpected "picnic," as they called it, which they were to witness.

They admired the stranger immensely, and wondered what hold it was that he had upon Donald King to force him to fight him and to agree that the victor should marry Isabel Drew, whom they had already given the name to of the Angel of Sports' Paradise.

With no show of emotion Kent Kingdon mounted his horse and rode slowly toward his position.

The crowd had formed in a body at the hotel, and Curley Kit the Overland driver—who, the reader will remember had taken Doc Dunning's place, and who happened to have delayed starting on the out run for a few hours, to attend the wedding—stood ready to give the word.

Both horsemen were well-mounted, and their pistols were in their belts.

The stranger was perfectly cool, and glanced over to where Isabel Drew stood with a smile of utter indifference at his danger.

Kent Kingdon also was cool, and as he reached his position smiled and threw a kiss to Isabel, who, white as a ghost and trembling, yet held by a fascination that kept her spell-bound, stood awaiting the desperate duel.

Kingdon had whispered to her, as he left her:

"Feel no anxiety, Isabel, about yourself, for no matter what I have agreed to, the men will not let that man have you, should I fall."

"Gents," called out Curley Kit, and his clear voice was heard by all. "You are to await my order to go, and you have to keep your hands off of your weapons until I gives the word."

"Then spur forward at full speed, drawing your guns and shooting for all you are worth."

"Does you understand?"

Both men bowed, and then, in a loud voice, came the single word from Curley Kit:

"Go!"

At the word the two men spurred forward, drawing their weapons as they did so, while the Angel of Sports' Paradise gazed at them spell-bound from her stand on the piazza of the Flush Hotel.

Both of the combatants drew their pistols with marvelous quickness, and the two weapons cracked together as one shot.

And each bullet found a target, that of the stranger in the head of the gambler's horse, and the latter's in the shoulder of his foe.

Down went Kent Kingdon's horse, but the active rider caught on his feet and rushed upon his enemy, still firing.

The shot in his shoulder had knocked the weapon of the stranger from his hand; but he quickly drew his second revolver with his left and fired twice in rapid succession.

But they were his last shots, for Kent Kingdon had also fired two shots, both of which had hit their mark.

The stranger reeled in his saddle, just as Kingdon grasped his bridle-rein and fired his fourth shot, the bullet crashing through his brain, silencing the cry upon his lips:

"I cry mercy, pard!"

"He shall make no confession here," hissed the Card King, and as the man fell from his saddle, he sent another shot into his brain to still his tongue forever.

Then loud and long were the cheers of the crowd, and forgetting their oath of obedience until after the marriage was over, a general rush was made for the bar of the hotel to drink the health of the Card King.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GAMBLER'S WIFE.

WHILE most of the miners ran to the bar of the hotel, and others gathered around the body of the fallen stranger, Kent Kingdon quietly took possession of the splendid animal ridden by the

man he had killed, and led him toward the piazza.

There a young miner took him to the stable for him, as Kingdon said:

"The horse belongs to me and is a good one, for I am the heir of that gentleman."

Then he turned to Isabel, who, in her great joy sprung into his arms.

The stentorian voice of Judge Dal was then heard, calling out:

"Oh yes! oh yes! oh yes! Come one, come all to witness the marriage of our great citizen, Donald King, to the beautiful Angel of Sports' Paradise."

A shout answered these words, and the miners rushed to their former stand to witness the ceremony.

"Oh, Donald! have them move the body from sight, for it seems like an ill-omen to have it near us when we are married," pleaded Isabel, and a number of miners hearing her hastily bore the stranger's body out of sight.

"Come, parson, we are ready for you now," coolly said Kingdon, while he whispered to the trembling girl at his side not to give way to nervousness.

"This seems so terrible, Donald, for a marriage to follow a death," she said.

But an impatient gesture from Kingdon, which the parson saw, caused that melancholy looking personage to at once begin the ceremony.

In a bold voice Kingdon answered the questions Parson Prim asked him, while Isabel's responses were hardly audible.

But, amid a silence that was painful, for the voice of the preacher alone broke it, the ceremony was performed that made Isabel Drew the wife of a man whose heart was as black with guilt as her own was free from all guile.

After the ceremony was over congratulations, rude, rough but honest, were showered upon the young couple, and the best of wishes for future happiness were drunk with a will.

Such was the courtship and marriage of Isabel Drew, born in refinement, reared in luxury and yet left alone in the world to become the wife of a man, who had confessed himself a fugitive from justice, and who was to remain with his young wife a dweller in a wild community.

Days passed away and then a letter came from Mrs. Jane Drew, and it was to the effect that regretting the death of her cousin David, she regretted equally as much that he had never been confidential toward her, and who his agents or lawyers were she had not the remotest idea.

She would try to discover, however, and in the mean time she could not understand why Isabel preferred to remain in that wild land of the West.

At this news Kent Kingdon bit his lips with vexation.

What if the lawyers of David Drew could not be found?

What if the money in the bank could not be discovered?

In such case he had married a girl who had really nothing.

He had bound himself to one whom he could not shake off.

He at once decided to make another effort to find the mines of David Drew and Dan Kennedy.

So he found an excuse to go and look at some mining property offered for sale, and departed alone.

Straight to the cabin of David Drew he went, and for several days he remained there, searching diligently for any hidden gold and for the mines.

But his search was unavailing, and cursing his ill fortune he returned to Sports' Paradise to find that another letter had come from Isabel's aunt and it told how utterly impossible it was to find out any clew whatever to the attorneys of David Drew.

The letter ended as follows:

"I really do not believe your father ever sent more money East than you received, and what you have laid by here in bank, some fifteen hundred dollars, is about all your inheritance, so you had better return and enter upon some kind of work, for you know my means are not large, Isabel; and my son Frank's wild escapades draw heavily upon me."

"What on earth you are doing among miners and such beings as you meet there I cannot understand; but if you meet some miner, young or old, who has found a fortune, you had better marry him, for your pretty face will readily secure you a husband."

Such was the unfeeling letter of Mrs. Drew, and Isabel shed bitter tears as she recalled how

utterly alone she was in the world, for already she was beginning to discover that her husband was not all that her husband painted him.

He would keep up his gambling, and she soon discovered that he was known as the Card King.

He seldom went to bed before two o'clock, and was wont to rise at noon, so that she saw little of him.

Then she had been awakened several times at night by shots, and a female servant who acted as her maid told her that she heard King had killed a man over a game of cards.

This happened several times, and poor Isabel dared not ask him of the truth of the girl's report, for he had flown into a temper with her when she had done so upon hearing of his having taken a life one night.

One Sunday afternoon, some six months after her marriage, she rode up to the burying-ground of Sports' Paradise accompanied by Kingdon.

The peculiarity of the burying-ground of Sports' Paradise was that not one-fourth of the number lying there had died a natural death.

Three-fourths had been slain in combat, or "died with their boots on," as the miners expressed it, and, as appreciation of this fact, to the head-board of each who had so passed in his checks, was fastened the occupant's boots.

Stopping their horses at a lot of five graves Kingdon said:

"Isabel, you know whose grave that is?"

"Yes, Donald, it is the grave of the stranger whom you killed on the day of our marriage," she said, sadly.

"Yes, Isabel, and the others who lie by his side, five in number, are gentlemen whose life-checks I was forced to call in," was the grim reply of the Card King.

Isabel turned pale with dread of this, for the words of her husband told her that the midnight shots she had heard, awaking her from sleep, had each one registered a human life called out of existence by the hand of the man who called her wife.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE YOUTH ON THE TRAIL.

"You are quite a young one to be comin' to these wild parts, hain't yer?"

The question was addressed to a youth of apparently eighteen, who sat upon the box of an Overland stage, which was penetrating the fastness of a range of mountains one pleasant afternoon.

The one who spoke was the driver of the coach, and he looked with considerable interest upon the youth, who was a handsome, sad-faced fellow with the look of one who was utterly fearless.

"I am young, yes, but I am going to the mining-camps to seek one whom I am most anxious to find," was the answer.

"Father, maybe?"

"No."

"Brother?"

"No, but one whom I am most anxious to discover."

"Give me his handle and maybe I can help you."

"His name is Kent Kingdon."

"Never heard o' him."

"You know the camps well?"

"Every one o' them up in these parts."

"And you know of no such man?"

"I doesn't."

"He might go under another name."

"That may be, specially if he's run away from the law."

"What kind o' fellow is he?"

"A tall man, with broad shoulders, splendidly formed and remarkably strong, carrying himself like a soldier."

"He always dressed well, was a dead shot, a good card-player, rode like an Indian and had a face handsome as a woman's."

"Dark hair and eyes?"

"Yes, and wonderfully fine eyes."

"There was a man in these parts some months ago who was the very pictur' o' the one you describe, young pard."

"A young man?"

"Yas, hardly over twenty-five, I should say."

"What was his name?"

"He called himself Donald King."

The youth started, and then muttered to himself:

"Donald King—King-don—a syllable of each name."

"It must be he, for who else would be like him."

Then aloud he asked:

"Is he not in the camps now?"

The stage was now rolling along on a ridge

that looked down upon the mining-camps, and to one side was the miners' burying-ground.

Pointing to a large cross, unpainted and rudely hewn, but at the head of a grave, the driver asked:

"Does yer see that monimint, pard?"

"The cross?"

"Jist so."

"Yes."

"Well, the man as lies under it was kilt by Donald King."

"Killed by him?"

"Yes, and over a game of cards."

"It was a fair fight, I guess; but Donald King was too quick on the shoot for my pard, and dropped him."

"Joe was a favorite with all, and so we decided one afternoon that it was best for Donald King to leave camp."

"He were not so easy to persuade as we thought, for it cost another life, afore he was our way o' thinking, and the grave yonder to the right was the second one he called to kingdom come."

"Two graves thus far upon his trail I find," muttered the youth.

"Well, Donald King concluded to go when we argyfied with him."

"And the trail that he took?"

"He went alone across country to strike the lower stage trail to the mining-camps in the valley below."

A look of disappointment swept over the face of the youth, and he asked quickly:

"When do you return?"

"To-morrow."

"Do you go anywhere near the other stage trail?"

"I goes to the station, where I strikes it."

"I'll return with you," was the reply, and the next morning when the stage rolled out of the mining-camp the youth was on the box with the loquacious driver.

The station where the youth got off was the one where months ago Kingdon had sold his horse to the agent and met Isabel Drew, the day he had taken Doc Dunning's coach on to Sports' Paradise.

Making inquiries of the station boss, the youth discovered that a man answering to the description of Kent Kingdon had sold his horse there and then gone on by stage to the valley mining-camps.

"Did you learn his name, sir?" asked the youth.

"Yes, and he's made it famous along this line, you can bet," was the reply.

"Ah! in what way?"

The station agent then told all he knew about Donald King, and how he had proven himself a hero in the attack of the road-agents on the stage-coach.

"Do you see that grave up yonder on the slope, young pard?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, that's his making, for a road-agent occupies that dirt-cabin who tried to stop him alone on the trail one day, and got left."

"Graves, graves mark the path of that man, wherever I follow him," muttered the youth, and the agent continued:

"As you go on, Kit Curley, whose coach will be in soon, will show you where the Overland toll-gatherers buried the two men whom the Card King kilt."

"The Card King?"

"Yas, for that's what they calls him now."

"And why?"

"Well, because he always plays a winning game of cards, and you bet nobody wants to accuse him of cheating, for it isn't healthy to do so, as some down in Sports' Paradise has found out."

"He has killed men there too?"

"Well, he has, and Kit Curley can tell you, for he knows him well."

"And he's in Sports' Paradise now?"

"You bet, young fellow, he's there large as life and twice as natural; but there sounds the stage horn," and to the ears of the youth came the sound of a bugle's notes.

Soon after the stage came in sight and Kit Curley sprung from the box as he drew rein before the station.

"One passenger for yer, Kit, and he's a handsome boy to be in these parts."

"What's yer name, young fellow?"

"My name is Kent King, was the hesitating reply."

"I guess you're lying, young pard; but it don't matter what's yer handle in these parts, so let me introduce you to the boss driver on the line, Kit Curley, and you goes with him through to Sports' Paradise."

The two shook hands and Kit Curley said:
 "You are a tenderfoot for these parts, pard."
 "I am able to take care of myself," was the reply, and half an hour after the youth, who had called himself Kent King, was seated by the side of Kit Curley as the stage rolled rapidly along toward Sports' Paradise.

CHAPTER XVI.

KIT CURLEY SURPRISED.

THE stage had not gone far on its way before Kit Curley discovered that he had a very pleasant companion in young Kent King.

The youth seemed to have traveled much, and he was by no means unused to border life.

He talked well, told a good story, and whiled away the time most pleasantly for the driver.

"I wished to ask you," said the young man, after awhile, "if you know one Donald King."

"Now I do, you bet."

"Who is he?"

"A gambler."

"He is called by the name of the Card King?"

"Yes, and he deserves the name."

"I have heard that he killed some road-agents on this line once?"

"He did, and I'll show you where their pards are planted."

"He saved the coach from capture, after poor Doc Dunning got his death wound, and he sent the team humming along over a road that few men dare drive over, and his handling of the ribbons so neatly just won the heart of a young lady passenger as was along."

"A lady?"

"Yes, and the prettiest girl I ever saw."

"She was so sweet the boys just called her the Angel of Sports' Paradise, and she could have had any man in the camps, and one as drives this hearse, too, just for the asking, you bet!"

"What was she doing here?"

"Came out to see her father, who was mining away off to himself to the southward and got sick."

"The Card King looked up her father, and found him dying in his cabin with consumption, and he took the girl there."

"But the old man had let go the ribbons of life, and was dead, and Don King buried him as neatly as an undertaker could have done."

"This settled it with the girl, and when he brought her back to Sports' Paradise he married her."

"Married her?"

"You are right he did, and such a lay-out was never seen afore, or since, in Sports' Paradise."

"I tell you it was 'way-up, and a pilgrim as came there and chipped in his yawp at the wedding, was just laid out cold by the Card King."

"Killed?"

"I should smile, young mister."

"And on his wedding day?"

"Why not, for the pilgrim was hunting for blood and he got it."

"I tell you it was a day to remember."

"And the young girl?"

"Ah, the angel?"

"Yes."

"She married the Card King; but they do say that she did take on sorrowful when she found out that her husband was a gambler."

"Poor girl; but who performed the ceremony?"

"A solemn-faced parson whom the boys call Old Death Head and Cross Bones."

"A real clergyman?"

"He looked it, for a more sorrowful man I never set eyes on."

"And the Card King is in Sports' Paradise now?"

"He was a month ago when I was there; but I've been off the line for several weeks on a little business trip of my own, and this is my first through run o' late; but I guesses he's there, for why should he leave when he's filling his pockets with gold dust and the graveyard with bones o' humans who picked a row with him."

"Ah! he still kills his fellow-men?"

"Well now he does lay one out about monthly, though he's as peaceable as a lamb until he is picked up by some smarty for a innocent and then gore has to flow."

"Does you know him?"

"I don't know Donald King, but I've heard much of him, so am anxious to meet him."

"You'll find him a terror, and his wife a beauty."

"I feel sorry for her, for he's got her into card playing, they say, and she is luck itself in handling the pasteboards."

"The Card King won't play a game for big money unless she is in the room."

"It seems a shame that he should have dragged her down to his level," said the youth indignantly.

"She loved him, pard, and when a woman loves a man she becomes his slave if he says so."

"I'm sorry for her, as I said, for she doesn't seem happy; but may I ask what you are going to do in Sports' Paradise, for you surely don't look like one who can work hard?"

The youth smiled and said:

"I am a gambler!"

"The deuce you are!"

"I am."

"Well, you'll get wiped out in Sports' Paradise mighty quick, for they are a hard lot there."

"I do not fear them."

"That may be, but young pard, I give you just one month to live, and that's being liberal."

"You had better go back East on my trip out."

"No, I shall remain in Sports' Paradise until I accomplish what I have come for."

"That is to make your fortune with cards?"

"It is to play a game for big stakes that I intend to win."

"Maybe."

"I will win, Kit Curley."

"You're a dandy for grit; but the town you are going to is red-hot Purgatory, as you'll find out."

"Yet the Card King's wife is there, and a card-player?"

"Yes, but she's a woman."

"Can you keep a secret, Kit Curley?"

"I can."

"Honest?"

"Square."

"Then I'll trust you."

"I am also a woman."

At those words Kit Curley uttered a loud cry and nearly sprung off of the box as he gazed upon the pretended youth by his side.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE QUEEN OF CARDS.

WHEN the passenger on the box with Kit Curley made the startling announcement that she was a woman, not a youth, the driver gazed at her in amazement.

He had not suspected the fact, for the cheat was a clever one.

The hair was cut short, the loose blouse jacket and woolen shirt concealed the graceful form, and the top boots had hidden the small feet.

But once he knew that his passenger was a woman Kit Curley wondered why he had not at once discovered her as such.

"Your name is Kit Curley, sir?" she said with a smile.

"Yes, miss, Kit Curley, or Curley Kit, for they calls me both names, and I don't care which comes first, so call me to suit your own convenience."

"Well, Mister Kit Curley, we are going to be friends, for I like you, and I wish you to take me under the shadow of your wing as it were."

"I'll do it; sir—I mean miss."

"Now I have come out to this country for a particular purpose which I cannot now make known to you; but, after what you tell me about Donald King being called the Card King, it has decided me upon taking a certain course, and I shall come out in my own feminine attire."

"I guess you'd be safer, miss, for the men o' Sports' Paradise are rough fellows to each other, and as a young man you'd have to suffer too; but they treat a woman like she was made o' glass, and you'd be sure of kindness only."

"All right, I have in my trunk a complete outfit of clothing, and I'll get you to help me put in the coach all that I need."

"I will dress up before we get to the camps, and when we arrive there you are to introduce me as Miss Camille, a lady sport, if so you will."

Curley Kit was in a quandary.

He hardly knew what to say or do, and yet he determined to "back the pretty girl up for all I'm worth," as he expressed it mentally.

And he told her so, and soon after pointed out to her the graves of the road-agents, killed the day that Doc Dunning lost his life.

"Graves will dot that man's trail until I—But I must not think aloud," and the face of the woman flushed as she spoke, as though she had half-betrayed herself to the driver.

Taking advantage of the stopping of the coach, by the graves, she opened her trunk and lifted from it certain articles of feminine garb,

putting them inside the coach, along with a valise that she also carried.

Then Curley Kit drove on, and when he drew rein before the door of the Flush Hotel, he was as startled, seemingly, at what he beheld as were those gathered about the piazza.

The welcome of those around the hotel, to Curley Kit, who had been absent the past few weeks, was suddenly checked when the eyes of all fell upon a perfect vision of loveliness who suddenly appeared before them.

Curley Kit had sprung from the box and stepped to the door, to help out his *protegee*, and most proud was he at beholding the one whom he had promised to befriend.

The short, black curls had been hidden under a wig of red-gold hair, which looked thoroughly natural.

She wore a close-fitting dress of blue cloth, trimmed with gold lace, and upon her head was a slouch hat, encircled by a cord of gold, while on the side, fastening up the brim, was a unique pin representing four cards—the queen of hearts, diamonds, spades and clubs.

Her hands were covered with gauntlet-gloves, upon which the same device was embroidered, and about her slender waist was a gold-lace belt and sash, and a pair of gold-mounted revolvers and a jewel-hilted bowie-knife were stuck in them with a look as though they were for use rather than show.

The face of the woman, with her marvelously expressive black eyes, was very beautiful, though the features were bold unto daring.

She certainly had made a most remarkable metamorphosis of herself in the stage-coach, and it was not to be wondered at that Curley Kit was taken aback both with surprise and admiration.

As she alighted from the coach the miners all doffed their hats politely, and one cried out:

"Another angel in Sports' Paradise, pard, so give her a welcome."

Some ringing cheers followed these words, and turning upon the crowd with the sweetest of smiles, the fair stranger said:

"I thank you, my friends."

"Kit, please take the gentlemen into the bar and treat them at my expense."

In border parlance, this, from such fair lips, fairly "paralyzed" the crowd, and the beautiful stranger slipped into the hotel and was presented to Judge Dal by Curley Kit.

In a bold hand she wrote her name:

"CAMILLE, QUEEN OF CARDS."

"I can give you most delightful quarters, miss, for I have some just vacated two weeks ago by the King of Cards and his wife," said the judge.

"What, Donald King?" she cried, starting.

"Yes, miss."

"Is he not here?"

"No; he left two weeks ago."

The judge saw her start at this, and her face pale, so he asked:

"Is he a relative of yours, miss?"

"He is one I hoped to have found here. Did his wife go with him?"

"Yes, miss."

"Two weeks ago?"

"Just that time."

"Where did he go?"

"No one knows, miss, for he left no word, and it wouldn't be healthy for curious people to follow his trail."

"Is he not to return?"

"I guess not, for he made a great many enemies here, and the boys would not have stood him so long but for his wife."

"But they gave him a week to light out in, and he lighted."

"What had he done?"

"Well, no one caught him at it, but somehow he always won at cards, so he was supposed to cheat."

"Ah!"

"Yes, miss, and when any one hinted it to him, why, there was a funeral followed mighty quick."

"He killed men?"

"He did for a fact, miss, and though he was generous enough to bury the dead, and pay all expenses, he began to populate a graveyard of his own, and so the boys told him to git, and he got."

"Well, I am sorry he has gone; but I am just in time to reign in his stead as Queen of Cards, where he was the King."

"You play cards, miss?"

"Yes, I am a gambler," was the smiling reply, and a merry laugh followed the look of amazement that came over the face of the judge at her words.

Ten minutes more and Camille, the Queen of

Cards, as she called herself, was in the little sitting-room and parlor vacated two weeks before by the man upon whose trail she was a tireless Nemesis.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FAIR NEMESIS.

WHEN her trunk and valise had been placed in her rooms, Camille at once set to work to make herself comfortable in her new home.

The reader, of course, recognizes in her the one who had vowed at the grave of Horace Manners to be avenged upon Kent Kingdon, his slayer, and who had then so mysteriously disappeared from her home, and was considered to have committed suicide.

Camille Cameron was a strange girl.

She had never been considered just like other girls, for, in her early life her father had lived at a frontier post with his family.

There she had, when a little girl, learned to ride wild mustangs, shoot a pistol and rifle, kill birds with a bow and arrow, and in fact become an expert in manly sports.

When her parents had died and she had gone East to dwell with the guardian in whose care she had been left, she never gave up the sports of her frontier life, and it was seldom that she met her equal with a rifle or revolver, while she would ride any horse no matter how wild or vicious.

Thus it was perhaps her early training, and life among plainsmen and Indians, that had made her more revengeful than otherwise she would have been, and determined her to go on the search of Kent Kingdon, to avenge the death of her lover.

She had decided to let all believe her dead, and, when she had gotten the money she had unexpectedly inherited, she had laid her plans to start upon the track of Kent Kingdon.

All the perils she would have to pass through, all the obstacles in her way she understood, and so she went West and entered upon a regular system of training.

She had always been an expert card-player, and she practiced with the "pasteboards" until her manipulation of them became really sleight-of-hand.

She put on the garb of a man, cut off her hair, and buying her a fine horse and weapons, spent her time in riding, and practicing with firearms.

At length she started upon her search, shaping her course according to what she had discovered of the whereabouts of Kent Kingdon.

She wished rather to torture him at first by causing him to feel that his steps were dogged by some one.

To play with him, in fact, as a cat might with a mouse before destroying him.

At last she happened upon his track, as has been seen, and her wandering had made her so thoroughly manly in actions that no one suspected her of being a woman.

In her wild thirst for revenge she rather enjoyed the life she led; but when she found out from Curley Kit that Kent Kingdon had married and was living at Sports' Paradise with his wife, she determined upon another plan of action.

She had prepared herself with both dresses and male attire, and also with disguises.

Her wig of red-gold hair was a perfect one, and she felt that Kent Kingdon would not recognize her, and she meant to fascinate him if she could.

For his wife she held no pity, for in the life she led she was losing her sympathetic nature and becoming cold and heartless.

To her deep regret she arrived at Sports' Paradise to find her enemy gone.

That he had gone suddenly, and mysteriously left no trace of his whereabouts, did not worry her in the least.

She would anchor at Sports' Paradise until she found him, and then once again follow on his trail.

That he had won the name of the Card King, decided her in taking the name of the Card Queen, and by a strange coincidence she had had made the pin which looped up the brim of her slouch hat.

She would remain at Sports' Paradise, perfecting herself more and more in her pistol practice and card playing, getting down to the finest detail all the incidents in Kent Kingdon's life there, and then be ready to still pursue him.

It would be a great joy to her heart if she could win from him his gold, and cause his wife to hate him.

She would be happy in this revenge, and yet she would only be content when Kent Kingdon

was dead and she felt that she had driven him to his doom.

"If I could drive him to despair, cause him to take his life with the very hand that drove the sword through the heart of Horace Manners, then I would be content," she said to herself over and over again.

And so it was that Camille, the Queen of Cards, became domiciled at the Flush Hotel in Sports' Paradise.

The day after her arrival at Sports' Paradise, Camille ordered Judge Dal to purchase her the best horse he could find in the camps, and also to send for a saddle and bridle for her at once.

She asked for a space in the bar for a card-table, and fitted it up in the best manner, at the same time erecting a "Wheel of Fortune" and a dais for herself to sit on as the Queen of Fortune.

Those who compared her with Isabel, the wife of the Card King, decided that she was even more beautiful than was the Angel of Sports' Paradise.

She had a free-and-easy manner about her, and yet kept all men at bay.

She called the judge "Dal," Kit Curley was simply "Kit," and she soon knew the names and nicknames of every man in the camp who frequented the Flush Hotel.

Judge Dal was in clover, for she drew the business from his rivals, and made his place more popular than ever.

To the delight of the miner she was wont to practice with rifle and revolver out in front of the hotel, and her target was a card.

She would make a "five-spot" out of an ace, also a tray out of an ace, and for her to vary ever so little from a line-shot and dead center was a very rare exception.

"She could pick out a man's eyes with a revolver at will," said an enthusiastic admirer, and seeing what she could do certainly increased the respect of the rough crowd for the mysterious woman.

At cards she always won; but then she gave all a chance to win with her wheel of fortune, as she took chances equally with the players.

The attendant at the Flush bar had orders to give the frequenters a "night-cap" each night at her expense, and this was a strong point in her favor.

As a horsewoman she was perfection, and she always went alone, going into the other camps and the recesses of the mountains without the slightest fear of any danger she might have to face.

Thus weeks passed away, and the Queen of Cards became the idol of the dwellers in Sports' Paradise.

And all this time she had men in her pay searching for the whereabouts of the King of Cards.

What she had discovered since her stay at the Flush Hotel convinced her that Kent Kingdon had not left Sports' Paradise, because he was considered a cheat, so much as on account of an outside pressure that had hastened his departure.

Whither he had gone, Camille, the Card Queen, also had an inkling, and in her own good time she intended to again dog his steps.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SECRET NOT HIDDEN IN THE GRAVE.

POOR Isabel had soon found out that perfect happiness, which she had hoped for, was not to be her lot.

Her husband had become cold, reserved in manner toward her, and his whole heart and soul seemed to be in making gold and hoarding it up.

His only means of support were cards, and he seldom lost.

Of course this caused the miners to look upon him with suspicion, and threats were made against him behind his back.

But these threats troubled Kent Kingdon but little.

He carried his life in his hand, and had been called upon to protect it so often, that those who sought to kill him were well aware that he was a dangerous foe.

Half a dozen graves were up in the burying-ground, and his hand had dug them for his victims.

As though proud of the little cemetery, he had the weeds kept off the graves, and had placed substantial timber monuments over each, particularizing in a cruel manner in the inscriptions how the lives of those beneath had been cut short.

A strange fascination seemed to impel Kent Kingdon to visit this spot often, and one afternoon he went there as was his wont, and was

viewing the graves with perfect complacency, when he was suddenly confronted by a man whom he did not remember to have seen before.

The cemetery was upon the crest of a hill, a spur that looked down the valley and jutted out from a range that ran back into the lofty, towering mountains.

The spot was wooded heavily, though the trees stood far apart, and so the stranger must have been in hiding there when Kent Kingdon went to the graves of his victims.

He was surprised at the sudden appearance of the stranger, but did not show it, and said quietly:

"Well, pard, are you searching for Sports' Paradise, or did you come here to pick you out a lot?"

The man was tall, erect and muscular.

His face was heavily bearded, and his expression was of mingled determination and recklessness.

He was armed, dressed in the garb of a miner, and certainly was a stranger in Sports' Paradise, for Kent Kingdon was sure that he had never seen him before.

"If I pick out a lot here, pard, it will be for you to occupy, and as for Sports' Paradise, I know where it is," he answered, with a coolness that showed he either did not know his man, or, knowing who the gambler was, did not fear him.

"Is that a threat?" sternly asked the Card King.

"I never threaten until I need to; but I'm here to see you, Mister Card King."

"To see me?"

"So I said."

"You appear to know me."

"I do."

"Where have we met?"

"But once before."

"When?"

"Some time ago."

"Where?"

"On the Overland trail."

"I do not recall the meeting."

"I suppose not, for you had but a glance of me then, while I had come to remember you, and, as you have grown famous, I have kept you in mind."

"Your words are Greek to me."

"I'll translate for you, then."

"Pray do."

"We met the day that Doc Dunning was killed."

"Ha! On the trail?"

"So I said."

"Who are you?"

"A road-agent I was then."

"And now?"

"I have reformed."

"Bah!"

"It is true, and I have you to thank for it."

"Indeed! and why?"

"You gave me a shot that well-nigh cost me my life."

"I followed you on horseback, believing I had my death-wound, and meaning to kill you if I could."

"I cut ahead by a trail in the mountains, and I fell from my horse, just as I headed the coach off."

"My horse ran off and left me; but I saw you draw up, steal the bag of gold we had failed to get, and go off in the woods and hide it."

"I could not follow you, and, but that my captain came there and found me, I would have died."

"But he took me on his horse to our camp, and nursed me for days."

"I told him of what I had seen, and he came here to find you."

"He found you, and that is his grave!"

And the man pointed to the grave of the man whom Kent Kingdon had killed in the duel on horseback, the day of his marriage with unfortunate Isabel Drew.

"You had better take warning from his fate, then."

"It does stand out as a warning; but when I got well I decided to reform, so as our band of trail toll-takers was broken up by our captain's death, I went to mining."

"Somehow luck has been against me, and I decided to hunt you up."

"For what reason?"

"To get a good start in life."

"You have come to the wrong person."

"I hardly think so."

"I will convince you if you doubt," and there was a wicked gleam in the gambler's eyes.

"You wounded me, pard, and I still feel it, so I wish to return East and settle down."

"You got ten thousand in gold by your bold play that day, when the toll-gatherers got the credit of robbing the coach."

"You have a beautiful wife, live in the best style this country affords, and you have laid by a large fortune made at cards."

"Well, come to the point, for I am growing impatient."

"I'll let you hear all in good time, so curb your impatience, Card King, for it's to your interest to hear me."

"Be quick about it, then."

"With the amount you stole from the stage that day, I can go East and settle down in business, so just pay over to me that sum."

"You are a fool."

"Not such a fool as you will prove yourself by not doing as I demand."

"Hah! you threaten again?"

"Yes, I do threaten you."

"And I repeat you are a fool, to come here and make such a demand of me."

"And you are the greater fool not to listen, for I shall make known your act to all in Sports' Paradise."

The gambler never moved a muscle at this threat, but gazed straight into the face of the road-agent.

After a minute he said:

"You've got the trumps on me, pard."

"I have, and I mean to play them."

"To a man who gets the drop on me I offer terms."

"Speak out, then."

"I will give you half the sum you demand."

"Not a dollar less than ten thousand."

"I have not so much."

"You have ten times as much, for I have not come here blindly to make my demand."

"Why, pard, I have been here a dozen times to find you."

"I will pay you the sum if you will await my return here."

"I will wait."

"Do you see yonder rock?"

The man glanced in the direction indicated.

"Yes."

"Go there and await my coming."

"Have you a horse?"

"Yes, over the hill yonder."

"Bring him to the rock and await for me."

"I'll do it; but don't forget to come."

"I will be there."

The stranger turned away and Kent Kingdon walked down the hill to the hotel.

In half an hour he retraced his steps to the graveyard, and beheld the man awaiting him near the rock, while his horse was hitched near by.

In his hand Kent Kingdon carried a bag, which appeared to contain some heavy weight.

Walking up to the man he said:

"I am here, so take your hush money."

The man eagerly held out his hands for the bag, as the Card King raised it as though to give it to him, when there was a smothered report, a cry, and the road-agent staggered backward and fell heavily.

He tried to get his hand upon his revolver, but the Card King sprang upon him and quickly disarmed him.

"You have killed me," groaned the man.

"I told you that you were a fool."

"And you are also a fool, for in killing me you have not buried the secret I hold in the grave, for I am not the only one who holds it, as you will soon know."

"Hah! hah! Card King, you will soon be hanged in Sports' Paradise by the very men you deem your friends."

"You have killed me, yes, and I will be another victim for you to bury, but there are others to avenge me."

"Curses upon you!" cried the gambler, and he drew the revolver he had concealed in the bag and aimed it at the man's head.

But there was no need to fire, for with a few convulsive gasps the road-agent breathed his last.

CHAPTER XX.

NUMBER THREE.

It was two days after his meeting with the road-agent in the cemetery, that the Card King left Sports' Paradise.

He went away mounted on his splendid horse and Isabel was by his side, while several pack animals followed in the rear, and the large dog which had belonged to David Drew, and which had become the constant companion of the gambler's wife, trotted close to the side of his mistress.

Where the Card King went no one knew, and many believed that the threats made against him had caused his hasty departure.

But they were wrong, for he cared little for the threats of the miners whose money he had won.

It was the fear that a third road-agent, knowing his theft of the treasure from the stage-coach would turn up, and if the secret was betrayed he would be quickly swung up to a tree.

So it was he returned to the hotel, told Judge Dal that he had been attacked by a stranger in the cemetery, and sent men to bury the body at his expense.

The next day he surprised Isabel by telling her that he was going to at once leave Sports' Paradise.

Her heart gave one great bound of joy.

Was he going to give up his evil life, to take her from the fearful existence she led, helping him in his gambling, and forced to dwell among such a wild lot of human beings?

Had he taken pity upon her at last, and was he going to do something to make her life happy?

Such were her thoughts, and she asked him quickly:

"Oh, Donald! tell me where you are going?"

"I do not know yet; but far away from here."

"Thank Heaven for those words, for you intend to give up this red, sinful life you lead, and become a changed man."

"I will give up the life I lead when I make a fortune large enough to support me as I desire to live," was the sinister response, and it brought tears into the beautiful eyes of the unhappy young wife.

The next day the Card King departed from Sports' Paradise, and, but for the love all felt for Isabel, he would have found that he had a score of men to deal with whom he had wronged ere he went away.

But they allowed him to depart in peace, and the Card King was remembered only as a desperate man who always gambled to win, and took all chances to do so.

Two weeks after, Camille Cameron arrived in Sports' Paradise, and not a soul could tell her whither the Card King had gone.

His trail had been lost in the mountains, a few miles away from the camps, rain had fallen since then, and the tracks were obliterated, and no one knew the destination the gambler had in view.

In the coming of the Card Queen, the Card King was quickly forgotten, for incidents of a most thrilling kind were, in that wild community but a nine days' wonder.

Camille soon found that she could handle cards far better even than had Donald King, and not a soul ever suspected her of cheating, and many were really glad to see her win.

She took big chances, did not flinch if she lost a large stake, and would always take any bet, no matter how large the amount offered.

Who she was no one could guess, and though she had scores of fine young fellows in love with her, not one had the courage to tell her of his love.

Even the judge dared not ask her to become the landlady of the Flush Hotel.

There was that about her that kept men at bay, and not a word was ever breathed in her presence that should not have been heard by ears polite.

"You are doing the boys more good, Queen Camille, than Parson Cross Bones ever did," the judge said to her.

One of her favorite walks was to the graveyard, and, as the Card King had done, she passed a long time at the resting-place of those who had fallen by his hand.

A strange fascination seemed also to hold her there, or to cause her to seek the weird spot.

"In dogging the steps of Kent Kingdon I follow a trail dotted with graves—a perfect skeleton trail he leaves behind him."

"But this skeleton trail that I am following must some day have an end, and bitter will be the ending," and the Card Queen fairly hissed the words through her shut teeth.

Hardly had she uttered them when she heard hoof-falls.

Turning quickly, the Card Queen, at the same time, dropped her hand upon a revolver and was ready to greet friend or foe.

She saw a horseman riding slowly toward her.

Seeing that he was discovered he halted, dismounted and hitched his horse.

Then he unbuckled his belt of arms, held them up to her view and hung them upon his saddle-horn as an indication that he came with no hostile intent.

The Card Queen made no move, and awaiting

his approach still kept her hand upon her revolver.

"I mean you no harm, miss," and the man doffed his broad sombrero.

She saw a man with a bearded face, and a reckless, dissipated look, but yet not a wicked one.

He was dressed in buckskin, top-boots, and wore a broad-brimmed sombrero.

Never did Camille remember to have seen him in the Sports' Paradise camps before, for she had come to know most every miner by sight and many by name.

"Well, sir, do you wish to speak to me?" she asked, quietly.

"Yes, miss, I have tried to see you here alone for some days, but there was always some one else about, so I hung back."

"And why wish to see me alone?" and a suspicion of foul play flashed from the eyes of Camille.

"Not to harm you, miss, for I would not do aught against you for a thousand in paying dirt."

"What then?"

"To ask you, miss, if you are tracking Donald King?"

"You refer to the man they call the Card King?"

"Yes, miss."

"What of him?"

"Are you not on his trail?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, miss, there are those in this camp that I know, though I keep away myself, and I have heard that you came here to find him."

"I did; but he has gone."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"I do not know; but I intend to find out."

"I am anxious to also find him, miss."

"What have you against him?"

"Do you see the newest-made grave at your feet, miss?"

"Yes."

"The hand of the Card King placed that man there."

"So I know."

"He was my brother."

"Ah!"

"Yes, miss, and when the Card King killed our captain and we dispersed, my brother and myself tried to reform."

"What were you?"

"Road-agents, miss," was the honest response.

"Ah!"

"Yes, miss; but we had luck go against us, and my brother said he would come and get money out of the Card King."

"He was a hard man to win gold from."

"He didn't intend to play cards for the money, miss, but to force it from him by a secret he held."

"That he failed his grave proves."

"And what is your secret?"

"I'll tell you on one condition, miss."

"Well?"

"Do you agree?"

"Let me hear your condition."

"I am a poor man now, in hard luck, and have no money; but if you will stake me, I will start on the trail of the Card King and find him for you."

"Well."

"And all I'll ask is to make him pay me money for my secret, and then, if you say so, I'll kill him for you."

"I will strike for my own revenge when the time comes; but I will pay you well to go and find the Card King for me."

"I'll do it, miss, and I'll tell you the secret I hold against him."

"Well, out with it."

"You will not use it so as to keep me from making a stake?"

"I will not."

"Well, miss, he robbed the stage-coach that day Doc Dunning was killed, and not the road-agents as he claimed," were the low-spoken words of the ex-outlaw.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOR REVENGE AND GOLD.

THE revelation of the road-agent about the Card King fairly startled Camille Cameron. She had discovered Kent Kingdon to be a very bad man. She knew that he held human life very cheap, and was ever ready to kill.

She remembered how often she had heard the story of Doc Dunning's death, and that the coach had been robbed by the road-agents, and the horses had run away and Kent Kingdon's skill as a driver alone had saved the team from destruction and the life of Isabel Drew as well as his own.

She had heard of the coming of a man, recognized as the road-agent chief, and forcing Kent Kingdon to fight him just before his marriage.

She knew that two weeks before her arrival in Sports' Paradise the Card King had killed a stranger in the cemetery.

Now the man before her told her that the man thus slain had been his brother.

"Do you mean what you say about the Card King?" she added, as these thoughts flashed through her mind.

"Every word of it, miss."

"That the Card King robbed the coach?"

"He did, for my brother was wounded by him, followed the coach and saw him halt and hide the money."

"The chief found my brother, and he told him what he had seen, and so the captain came here and made the Card King fight it out or pay up."

"He got killed, for Donald King was a better man than he counted him to be."

"Then my brother got well and we started to work in the mines."

"But luck turned its back upon us, and he came here to make the Card King pay the amount he had stolen or to tell on him."

"He never came back, and the rumor soon reached me that my brother had been killed."

"Now I am here, and I seek both gold and revenge."

"I have heard that fortune always smiles on you, miss, and I decided to look you up, and, as it was said you had come to Sports' Paradise to look up the Card King, I thought I could help you, if you were willing to pay my way, and let me get out of him what I could first."

"I will do so; but he is a dangerous man to confront. How much money will you wish?"

"I ought to have five hundred, miss, for I don't know what my expenses will be."

"Come here at sunset and I will give you the sum you ask; but remember, if you find the Card King and harm him, I'll follow you to the ends of the earth."

Her eyes flashed fiercely as she spoke, and the man asked, quickly:

"Lor', miss, do you love him?"

She made no reply to his question, but said:

"Remember my threat."

"Meet me here at sunset, and you shall have the money."

"When you have found the Card King, return here to Sports' Paradise for me, and I will accompany you to where he is."

"I will come for you, miss," and the road-agent watched the willowy form of the Trailing Nemesis as she glided along the path leading down to the Flush Hotel.

"Is it hate or love that causes her to wish to find the Card King?"

"I'm blessed if I know, for women are too deep for me to find out their ways."

So saying, the road-agent, with a glance at the grave of his brother, returned to his horse, and mounting, rode slowly back along the ridge that ran into the lofty range of mountains a mile away.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SOLDIER TO THE RESCUE.

TRUE to her word the Card Queen went to the cemetery at sunset.

The man was already there awaiting her, and bowed with awkward politeness as she approached.

"I have trusted you, sir."

"Yes, miss."

"And have brought you the money."

"You won't regret it, miss, for I'll find the Card King for you, I promise."

"Do so, and the sooner the better."

"I'll lose no time."

"Here is your money," and she handed to him a bag of gold.

"Thank you, miss, and good-by, for I'm in an unhealthy neighborhood, so am anxious to get away."

"When I come for you, I'll fix up a bit and disguise myself so as to come right to the hotel to see you; but they know my face in these parts as it now is."

"Good-by," and the Card Queen retraced her way to the Flush Hotel, while the man who was to become a detective on the track of the Card King, returned to his horse and went back into the mountains.

Thus the days passed on in Sports' Paradise, the Card Queen daily becoming more and more popular with the miners, and many of them envying Curley Kit, who seemed to be her best friend, for at every run into the town he was wont to see her alone, and she appeared to seek his advice rather than that of anybody else.

One afternoon the Card Queen had mounted her spirited horse and gone out for a ride alone, as was her custom, for she never sought to have company, and in fact avoided it.

She had halted her horse in a small canyon, just off the trail, and dismounting was busy gathering wild flowers, when she was startled by seeing three men advancing toward her.

A glance showed her that she knew the men, so she felt no fear.

One was a young man who had evidently been well reared.

He had a fine form, but his once handsome face had been stamped with crime and dissipation so that his beauty was destroyed.

He had given up mining and taken to gambling, and many said that it was to be constantly near the Card Queen.

Once, in an impassioned way, he had met her in the cemetery and told her that he loved her.

He had frankly confessed that he had been a gentleman, had killed a man in a quarrel and was a fugitive from the gallows.

"I was a fugitive, a vagabond, all that was wicked until I saw you, Queen Camille; but since I met you I have loved you, and loving you I have tried to be good for your sweet sake."

"I ask your love in return, and I will become a different being."

So he had said, and then he awaited her response.

It was given in a manner that he could not misunderstand.

She had loved once, and no other love could ever enter her heart for any man.

She had a mission to fulfill, and she would rest only when it was done.

Never again must he speak to her upon the subject of love, unless he wished her to hate him.

Such were her words, and he bowed in submission to them.

Now, as she saw Wicked Will, for so he was called, approaching her, she smiled pleasantly upon him and his companions and asked banteringly:

"Are you lost, that you are so far from the camps?"

"No, we are searching for a rich lead, Queen Camille, and I have found it."

With his words he grasped her hands so quickly and firmly that she could not resist.

At the same moment a blanket was thrown about her by one man, while the third began to securely bind her with a lariat.

Why she gave a cry for help, Camille did not know, for she never expected to have her voice heard there in those wilds.

But she did give one loud cry, and almost instantly a horseman dashed upon the scene, the hoof-falls of his horse not having been heard in the sandy canyon, which he had spurred into from the trail upon hearing a cry for help in a woman's voice.

The horseman who appeared so unexpectedly to the kidnappers of Queen Camille, was a soldier, well mounted, well armed, and with the face of a man who never stood on odds where duty was concerned.

His keen eyes took in the situation at a glance.

With one shot he sent Wicked Will to the ground, a bullet in his head, and a second brought down one of his comrades.

Two of the three had fired upon him as he appeared in sight; but they were the last shots they could ever make.

The third turned to fly, but the soldier was upon him, and, unheeding the shots hastily sent at him by the flying man, he suddenly grasped him by the shoulder, dashed his fist into his face with stunning force, and then dragged him back to the spot where Camille stood, her face flushed with anger, and at the same time glowing with admiration at the gallant rescue of the soldier.

The horseman seemed amazed at beholding before him a beautiful woman.

Raising his hat, he asked in a voice strangely musical in tone:

"Are you hurt, lady?"

"Not in the least, sir; but that harm has not befallen me I owe it to you, for those men intended to carry me off, where, Heaven only knows."

"Will you let me thank you, sir?"

She spoke earnestly, holding out her hand as she did so, while she could not but admire the superb physique and stern, handsome face of the officer, for he wore straps upon his broad shoulders.

"I am happy in having been near to serve you, lady, having ridden ahead of my escort half a mile or so."

"They will soon be along and I will escort you to your home, if you will permit me to do so."

"I thank you, sir, and I will accept your kind offer if it does not carry you out of your way."

"I am living at Sports' Paradise."

"And I am going there to halt for the night."

"My name is Frank Powell, lady, and I am a surgeon in the United States Army, now on my way to the fort."

"I have heard of you, sir, if you are the famous Surgeon Scout, as I believe?"

"I am so called," he said with a smile.

"And I am called Camille, the Queen of Cards; but here come your men."

An escort of twenty soldiers just then dashed up, anxious about their officer, for they had heard the pistol-shots.

"I feared you were in trouble, sir," and the sergeant saluted.

"No, sergeant, but this lady was."

"Throw those two dead bodies across the pack-horses, and secure this prisoner and bring him with you."

"Permit me to aid you to mount, madam," and Surgeon Powell led the horse of the Card Queen up and raised her to the saddle as easily as he might a child.

Placing himself by her side he started along the trail toward Sports' Paradise, and his men soon after followed with the two bodies and the prisoner, the latter showing by his scared face that he expected no mercy for his attack upon the Card Queen.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DOOM OF THE KIDNAPPER.

As they rode out of the canyon together, the Surgeon Scout asked Camille:

"Did I understand, madam, that you were known as the Card Queen?"

"Yes, sir, I am known in Sports' Paradise as Camille, the Card Queen," she returned with a smile.

"I have heard of you, but I never pictured such as you bearing the name."

"How did you picture me?"

"I have met women on the border who gambled heavily, and thus won names to suit them; but I had not anticipated finding in the Card Queen of Sports' Paradise a—lady!"

"Thank you, sir, and I am glad to see that my wild life has not caused you to deem me otherwise."

"Still, Surgeon Powell, I am a gambler!"

"Strange is it that you are."

"No, not when all circumstances are considered as to why I am such; but I am treated here with the utmost respect by all, and the attack on me to-day was a great surprise."

"The leader of those three men was born a gentleman, but had gone wholly to the bad, and refusing his offer of love to me, he doubtless sought revenge, leaguely with him two of the worst characters in the camps."

"You have rendered good service in killing Wicked Will and one of his comrades, and the other will quickly end his days at the rope's end."

"He deserves it; but have you no friends in the camps?"

"All of the miners are my friends."

"No kindred?"

"None, for I am alone, I may say."

"In fact, to be frank with you, I am following a trail, and my kindred believe me dead."

"I gamble warily, win largely, and am content, or must be."

"Some day I will come to the end of the trail I follow, and then my life shall be different, and I will make up by good deeds for all the evil I may have done."

"Now, let us talk of something else, Surgeon Powell, than of myself."

He bowed acquiescence, too much of a gentleman to wish to push his inquiries further, and said:

"It is quite a coincidence that a week ago I was in a mining-camp where there was a man known as the Card King."

She uttered a slight cry, and he saw the sudden start she gave and that her face paled.

"Indeed, sir, and where was that, may I ask?" she returned in the calmest manner, instantly controlling any emotion that she felt.

"It was in the Sunset City camps."

"Did you see this distinguished personage known as the Card King?"

"No, I did not, Madam Camille; but I heard the men talking of such an individual who always won at cards."

"Did you hear if he was married?" asked Camille, in the most indifferent manner imaginable.

"I did not."
 "In the Sunset City mining-camps, you said, I believe?"
 "Yes."

"Strange, is it not, sir, that there should be a King of Cards and a Card Queen also?"

"It is a coincidence, Madam Camille," answered Surgeon Frank Powell, and he knew that there was some tie that bound the two strange persons together, but what it was he did not try to fathom, feeling that it was none of his affair.

There was quite a stir at the Flush Hotel when Camille rode up with a soldier escort, and the two bodies and the prisoner were seen.

The judge in alarm ran out to greet her.

In a few words Camille told of the attack on her and the rescue by Surgeon Powell, and then, telling the latter that she would see him at supper, she went to her room.

Judge Dal was a man of quick action, and he no sooner heard the story of Camille than he called the miners together and had them draw lots for twelve jurymen to try the prisoner, Sandy.

The judge acted as judge, and Surgeon Powell was invited to a seat upon the "bench" by his side.

But the Surgeon Scout declined the honor, and while smoking a cigar on the piazza, calmly looked at the surroundings.

The judge told the story as he had heard it from Queen Camille, and called upon the surgeon as a witness.

The testimony of the Surgeon Scout was quickly given, and in a few words.

"I was ahead of my escort half a mile, and heard a cry in a woman's voice.

"Running up the canyon I saw the lady, whom you call Queen Camille, struggling with three men, who were trying to bind her and wrap a blanket about her.

"They saw me and opened fire, and returning it I killed two, and then made the third a prisoner.

"That is all there is about it."

"It's enough," said Judge Dal, and turning to the prisoner he said:

"Sandy, what have you to say?"

"Mighty leetle, Pard Jedge, and that leetle won't do no good."

"Well, out with it."

"Yer see Wicked Will were sweet on ther queen and axed my pard and me to help him carry her off.

"He said he would take her to a cabin in the mountains and make Parson Cross Bones go there and marry them.

"He said she always carried plenty o' money with her, and that would go to my pard and me, and her diamonds too, and we agreed, but the leetle game went ag'in' us."

The judge then turned to the jury and said:

"Gents, you have heard the why and wherefore of this disgraceful affair in which Sports' Paradise miners have been engaged?"

"We have," came in a chorus.

"Two of the villains are unfortunately dead, gents of the jury; but there's one left, and I'd know your pleasure regarding him?"

"Hang him," came from every lip, and the crowd shouted with one accord:

"So say we all of us!"

That settled the doom of the desperado, and ten minutes after Sandy was dangling from a rope end from the limb of a tree.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CURLEY KIT'S AVOWAL.

THE day following his arrival in the camp of Sports' Paradise, Surgeon Frank Powell went on his way.

Queen Camille had treated him most kindly, and he had gazed with wonder at her as she stood at the gambling-table that night, in very truth a Queen of Fortune, for luck seemed to constantly attend her.

Without solving the mystery of her being in that wild country, he bade her farewell, feeling a deep interest in the strange woman.

When she saw him ride away Queen Camille sighed, and the tears came into her eyes.

"There is a noble man, indeed!"

"Would that I could tell him all and ask his advice!"

"But he would have urged me to return to my friends, and give up this trail of revenge that I am on.

"No; I must follow it to the end, and I believe the end must come soon."

The Surgeon Scout had not been long gone, when a horseman rode up and asked the judge if Camille, the Card Queen, lived there.

"She does."

"Will you tell her that I am here with a letter for her?"

The judge delivered the message, and the stranger was asked to go up to the Card Queen's little sitting-room.

"You do not know me, miss?"

"Yes; you are the man who went on the trail of Donald King?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I traced him to Sunset City camps, miss, and he has disappeared from there, but his wife yet remains."

"Ah! and where has he gone?"

"I do not know, nor could I find out; but I believe his wife knows, though she pretends to believe that he has deserted her."

"You have done well, and I will go to the Sunset City camps with you.

"When can you start?"

"Whenever you wish, Queen Camille."

"Then we go to-morrow."

"Here, take this money and get three pack-horses, and buy a fresh animal for yourself, and weapons, too, if you need them.

"I will give you a list of what I need," and she hastily wrote out what she wanted, and the man departed.

That night the miners of Sports' Paradise saw Queen Camille for the last time, and they were fairly dismayed when she told them that she was to leave them.

More she did not say, but she firmly refused their offered escort on her way, and the next day, attended only by the man whom she had employed as a detective and guide, she rode away from Sports' Paradise followed by the farewells and good wishes of the miners, both good and bad, for all were greatly attached to her.

The judge seemed almost broken-hearted and vowed that he would give up the Flush Hotel and go East and marry.

As Queen Camille entered the canyon, which shut out the camps from sight, she saw a man standing in the road apparently awaiting her coming.

It was Curley Kit, and his face was pale and manner nervous.

He had arrived in camp that morning, and looked fairly dismayed when told that the Card Queen was going to leave Sports' Paradise.

She had asked for him, to say good-by, but he could not be found, and she suspected that he had gone off so as not to bid her farewell.

"Poor Kit," she said to herself, as she saw him in the trail, and telling her guide to ride on and she would overtake him, she halted and said:

"Well, Kit, what are you doing here?"

He dropped all dialect of the border, and looking into her face with earnest eyes and grasping her hand said, with a voice that quivered with emotion:

"Camille, I am here to see you, to tell you that I am glad that you are going away from this place, to ask you to let me follow you, for I love you and would make you my wife."

"It cannot be, dear Kit, it cannot be," she said, sadly.

"I am not the rough fellow I have seemed to you, for I am a college graduate.

"I ran off from my home to make my fortune, and though I drive the coach, it is from love of adventure, for I am rich, Camille."

"Let me beg you to allow me to follow you to where you are going and make you my wife?"

"No, Kit, I have always had a sincere friendship for you, and you have been most kind to me; but we can never be more to each other."

"Good-by, Kit, forget me, and God bless you."

She grasped his hand and a tear fell upon it.

"Good-by, Camille," he said sadly, and his lips were white and quivering.

As she turned a bend in the canyon she glanced back and saw him standing where she had left him, gazing after her.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FATE OF ISABEL.

HAD any one from Sports' Paradise, excepting Kit Curley, seen the Card Queen the morning after her departure from the camps, they would never have known her.

She had brought on a pack-horse the contents of her trunks, and the red-gold wig had disappeared, as had also the dress and other feminine attire.

The guide had fairly started the next morning, when he sought the wicki-up which he had made as a camping-place for Queen Camille, to find a young man there.

"Don't be alarmed, guide, for this is the best

rig for me to travel in, and I am well accustomed to man's attire," she said, quietly.

And so they continued on their way, and the third day reached the Sunset City camps.

Going to the Bed Rock Hotel, she asked for one Donald King, known as the Card King.

The landlord told her that the Card King had left there some time before, going no one knew where.

"And his wife?" she asked.

"Is in her room, poor thing, and ill with sorrow."

"If you are her friend it will be a comfort for her to see you, young pard."

"I will go up and see her," and Camille went to the room occupied by the deserted wife.

Entering, when told to do so in answer to her knock, she saw before her the wreck of a beautiful girl.

Haggard, white-faced and with a look of intense sadness upon her face, poor Isabel was but a specter of her former beautiful self.

She gazed with surprise at the handsome youth who entered, and asked:

"Who are you?"

"Your friend," replied Camille, touched to the heart at the suffering face turned upon her.

"I have no friends."

"Yes you have, for I am one, and I have come to see you, if you are the wife of Donald King."

Isabel shuddered, and hid her face.

"Come, my poor child, I am not a man, but like yourself, a young girl, who has assumed this disguise for a purpose, so tell me of your sorrows?"

In answer Isabel threw herself into the arms of Camille and burst into tears.

After awhile she became calm and said:

"Yes, I married Donald King, believing that he loved me, and would make me a true husband."

"I found him to be false, cruel and all that was wicked, and now he has deserted me, while my heart is breaking."

"Oh! if he only had remained until I died, for my health is broken and I cannot last long."

Then Camille made known to the poor wife who she was, and all that Kent Kingdon had been.

"Now you know how unworthy he was of you, so forget him, cast him out of your heart and go with me, and we will live together in a pleasant little cabin home until you are once more in good health."

"No, I cannot go, for I am dying."

"My poor father died with consumption, and I will soon follow him."

"But you will not leave me?"

"No, indeed."

"Tell the landlord you are my brother, and then you can be with me all the time, and I have much for you to do for me, as a letter received from my father's lawyers tells me that I am heiress to quite a fortune."

"I wish to leave you a—"

"No, no, I am well off, so do no think of me."

"Then, after leaving my aunt something, I will devote the balance to a home for friendless girls, such as need help, and you will attend to all for me, for you can feel for me."

Camille promised, and from that moment devoted herself to the care of the dying wife.

Her guide she paid for his services, and told to go his way; but if he could find out aught of the Card King to come back and seek her out and he should be well paid.

Thus some months passed, and Isabel gradually faded away, until one night she sunk into her last sleep, her dying words breathing a blessing upon the head of the Card Queen who had proven her truest friend.

In a pretty vale the gambler's wife was buried, and with her papers and effects Camille was preparing to go East and deliver all into the hands of the attorneys of David Drew, when the guide suddenly appeared in Sunset City.

"Well?" she asked as he came to her room.

"He is dead."

"How know you?"

"He left with a gold train to go to the nearest station, and some white renegades led the Indians upon them and massacred all but one man."

"And that man?"

"Was myself."

"You?"

"Yes."

"You have more to tell?"

"I left here and began the search for the Card King."

"He had covered up his tracks well, after he had cruelly deserted his wife, and it was no easy task to find him.

"But at last I heard of a man answering his description as having gone to the New Mexican mines.

"So I went there, and the very day of my arrival a gold-train of pack-mules was starting from the mines.

"I recognized the Card King, dressed as a Mexican, and he was going with the train, for he had a lot of gold along.

"So I at once joined the train to follow him, and know just where he was going.

"I got work as a driver, and the train started.

"We traveled slowly, and a week after leaving went into camp on a canyon.

"I took my rifle and climbed up the mountain to shoot some game, for it was an hour to sunset.

"Just at dark I returned, and as I got a view of the camp, I suddenly heard a volley of rifle-shots, wild yells, and a hundred of Indians rushed upon my companions.

"The trainmen fought them bravely, but one by one they were slain."

"And that man?" hoarsely asked Camille.

"He fought like a demon; but I saw him fall at last, utterly riddled with bullets and arrows."

"You are sure it was the Card King?"

"Could I mistake him for any other?"

"And might he not have been only wounded, and escaped?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I fled as fast as I could, and went to the fort, sixty miles distant, and returned there with a party of soldiers, under a surgeon who acted as commander."

"His name?" eagerly said Camille.

"Surgeon Frank Powell, and the soldiers call him the Surgeon Scout, while the Indians give him the name of White Beaver."

"And what then?"

"The pack-mules and gold were gone; but the bodies of all the men were there, though the wolves had torn them nearly to pieces."

"And the Card King's body?"

"Was there."

"How many were along with the train?"

"Twenty-seven including myself."

"How many bodies were there in the canyon?"

"Twenty-six."

"Can you guide me there?"

"Certainly."

"Then we will start for the scene of the massacre to-morrow," was the determined response of the Card Queen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GRAVES IN THE CANYON.

CAMILLE, the Card Queen, was hard to convince of the fate which the guide told her had overtaken the Card King.

"It was too merciful a doom for that man to meet, to fall in battle, even though it was in defending his gold.

"Somehow I do not believe that he is dead.

"I do not doubt the guide, and yet I feel a doubt, so must see the scene of the massacre."

So she decided, and her trip East was put off until her return.

She wrote Mrs. Drew of the death of Isabel, and told her that she would follow her letter as soon as possible, and make known the facts of the case.

She also wrote to the attorneys, whose address Isabel had given her too, and made known to them that she had the will made by her and witnessed properly, and this with the papers and effects of the dead woman she would bring with her.

It was a couple of days' ride to the fort, and there, as the guide had said, was the scene of the massacre.

The torn bodies of some of the animals killed were found lying about, and the wolves ran yelping away from them at the approach of the party.

Then there was the grave of the dead, twenty-six in number, and the guide selected the one in which he thought the Card King had been buried.

"Open the grave," Camille had ordered, and she walked a short distance off, as though overcome with her feelings.

The guide obeyed the order, and in a short while the body was revealed of a man clad in the Mexican costume, torn and bedraggled as it then was.

Bending over the guide raised the hand and then dropping it walked quietly toward where Camille stood apart.

"This ring was not seen by the soldiers, for I just took it from the hand of the dead man.

"Do you recognize it?"

She eagerly grasped the ring and gazed upon it, after she had wiped off the dirt.

It was a seal ring, the stone having been cut in the shape of a star, and on it were the letters:

"K. K."

"It is his ring, for I have worn it myself in the past, and know it but too well.

"I shall keep the ring, guide."

"And you are convinced that there is no doubt now as to his death?"

"I am convinced."

"Fill the grave up quickly and let us get away," and Camille walked rapidly to her horse and, mounting, rode off alone.

She knew that her face was writhing with the emotion she could not conceal, and she did not wish her escort to see her then.

She recalled her first meeting with Kent Kingdon and how he had fascinated her, and she believed it love.

She remembered then how she had met Horace Manners and loved him with a depth that had proven to her that she had not really felt love for Kent Kingdon.

The duel was recalled, her dying lover's agony, the flight of Kent Kingdon and then her determination to follow him to the bitter end.

And all that she had suffered she recalled, as she rode along the trail leading from the canyon, and she remembered, as a hideous nightmare, the scenes through which she had gone.

She thought of how poor Isabel had suffered at the hands of the Card King, and her face grew hard and cold as marble.

"Horace, you are avenged, and you, poor Isabel, are also avenged, for he has met his doom."

"Slain by red-skins, and then his body torn by wolves, was Kent Kingdon's fate; but he fell not by my hand."

"So be it; I must be content, for I have done my duty."

Then the escort overtook her, and back to Sunset City she went.

There the guide and escort were paid liberally for their services, and two days after Camille took the stage over the Overland for the East, carrying with her the effects of the unfortunate wife of Kent Kingdon, who lay in her grave in the mountains, a grave above which the Card Queen had had placed a head-board, having the inscription:

"IN MEMORY OF

ISABEL DREW KINGDON,

A Heart-broken Woman,

and a victim of

a man's inhumanity.

Died Oct. 10, 18—."

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

MESSRS. LOCKWOOD & LOCKWOOD, Attorneys at Law in New York City, were seated in their office busy over their law duties when a card was brought in on which was the name:

"MISS CAMILLE CAMERON."

"Why, that is our correspondent in the mines, Henry," said Ingersoll Lockwood to his brother, and he at once ordered the boy to admit the lady.

A moment after Camille Cameron swept into the room.

Her hair was short, and her face was bronzed, but she was dressed most stylishly and looked very beautiful.

The two lawyers had expected to see some miner's wife, or daughter, and they arose with alacrity as this vision of feminine loveliness swept up to them.

"Be seated, Miss Cameron, and let me say to you that we are glad to see you in New York," said Henry Lockwood.

Camille took the seat placed for her by the polite attorney and at once entered into conversation upon the subject of her coming to see them.

"You must let me tell you my story in my own way, gentlemen, and more, you must promise strict secrecy about what I tell you regarding your unfortunate client, for though I wish to make known everything to you, there is no

reason why the misfortunes and sorrows of Isabel Kingdon should be spread before the world to be food for gossip."

The lawyers agreed with her, though wondering what she had to tell, and they promised to keep her confidence inviolate.

Then she began to tell her story, and she spared not herself in doing so, honestly making known why she had gone West and all that she had passed through.

The death of their client, David Drew, and what followed in the life of Isabel, she told of, and the two men deeply felt for all that the young wife had suffered.

"I have brought with me, gentlemen, all of the effects of Isabel, and they are at my hotel."

"She made her will, and it was drawn up by an army chaplain, who had once been a lawyer, and who happened to be in Sunset City at the time, while the landlord and others witnessed it."

"This will leaves to you pay for your services in your own discretion, and ten thousand dollars to her aunt, Mrs. Jane Drew, while the balance goes to found a home in her native town for homeless girls."

"But yourself, Miss Cameron?"

"I am rich and would accept nothing."

"And her husband, this wicked man Kent Kingdon?"

"Is dead."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, for I visited his grave, and this ring, which I know well, was taken from the finger of the body."

"Then there is no doubt?"

"None, sir."

"We will carry out the wishes of our unfortunate client to the letter, Miss Cameron, and we beg you, if we can ever serve you in any way, to call upon us."

"Thank you, gentlemen," and Camille took her departure, and after she had delivered the effects of Isabel into the hands of the lawyers on the following day, she left the city for a home in the country, where she wished to spend a few weeks, until she could decide upon her future course, for she cared not to return to her guardian's home just then.

To her surprise she found upon the train a man whom she had known as a miner in Sports' Paradise.

He recognized her at a glance, and too late she thought of denying her identity.

"Why, Queen Camille, it does my eyes good to see you; but who would ever have thought of seeing you here?"

"I knew you, though your hair is black and cut short, and I am so glad to see you again."

"You see, I saved up my diggings, and come home a rich man, for I am on my way out to my Jersey home where my parents live."

So he ran on, and Camille listened, until at last he said:

"And who do you think I saw in Denver two weeks ago?"

"Who was it, Mr. Burton?"

"Why, the man you seemed so anxious to find, the Card King?"

It was hard for Camille to keep back the cry that arose to her lips, and she turned deadly pale.

"It is impossible that you should have seen him, for he is dead," she said, hoarsely.

"No, he is not dead, for I saw him."

"There is some mistake."

"There was none, for he was gambling, and I stood by his side, and he had as a pard the man who was your guide when you left Sports' Paradise."

"You are sure?" and she grasped the arm of the returned miner with terrible force.

"I am, for I talked with the Card King, and he told me that he was going into cattle-raising on the plains; but you are ill, Queen Camille?"

"It is nothing—merely a faintness; but this is my station, so good-by."

And rising, she left the car, greatly to the regret of the young miner, who had been rejoiced at meeting her again.

"And, after all, Kent Kingdon lives, and my dogging his steps over that long trail has been all in vain."

"Well, let me find some secluded spot in which to hide myself, and to Heaven I leave the punishment of that wicked man!"

And Camille Cameron entered the carriage that was to carry her to her destination, and throwing herself back upon the seat, seemed almost overwhelmed with the emotion that surged up in her breast and brain at the knowledge that Kent Kingdon still lived to curse the earth with his presence.

THE END.

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